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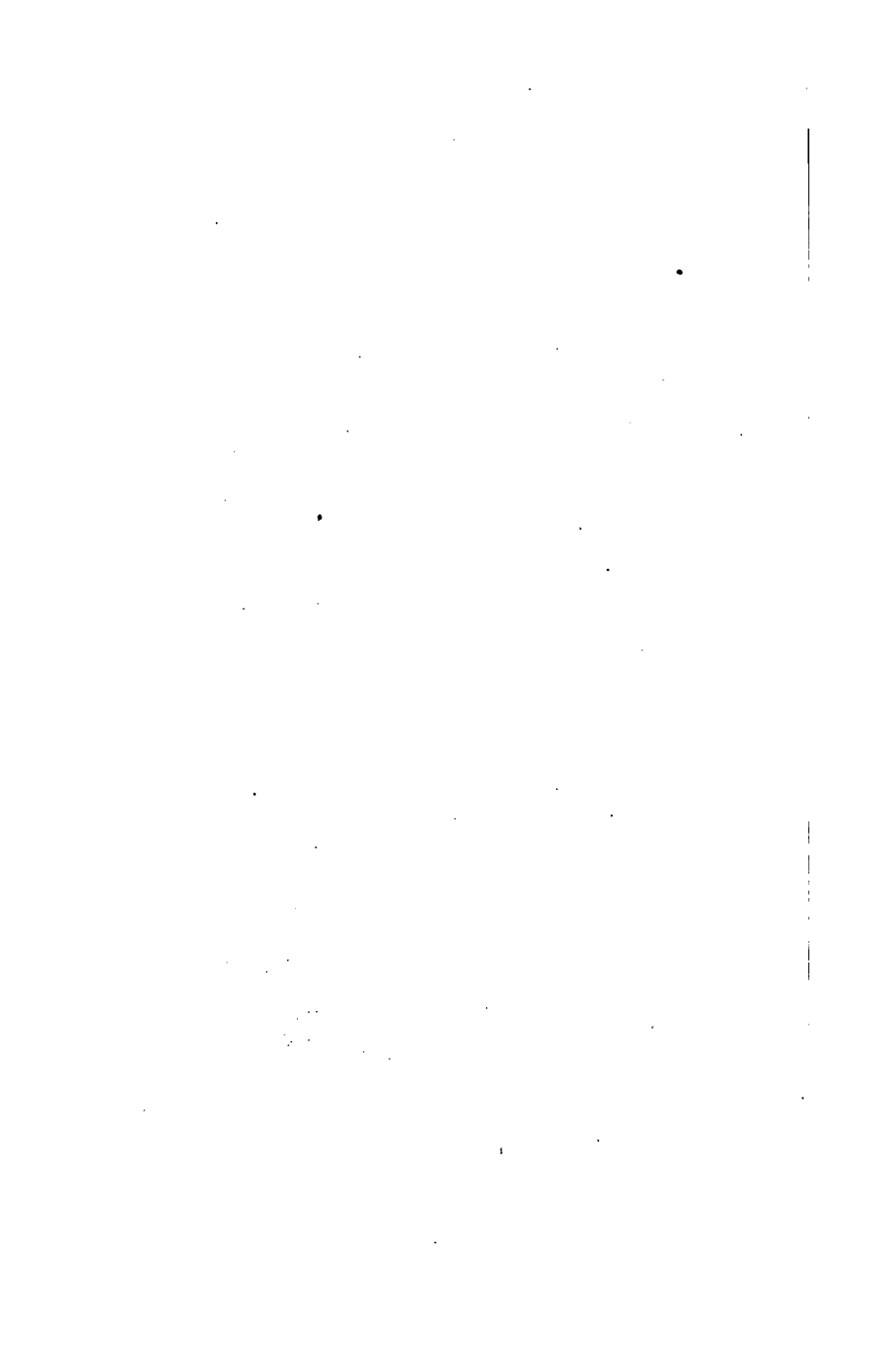
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THE FUTURE LIFE

OF

BLESSEDNESS.

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LONDON:

WILLIAM MACINTOSH,

24, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1865.

141. k. 56.



PREFACE.

THE following pages, relating to one of the most interesting of all the subjects on which the mind of man can be exercised, are published in the hope that Christ's true disciples, walking by faith in the Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them, may be enabled to catch by their aid some cheering glimpses, faint though they may be, of the blessedness in store for them, and for which they are kept by the power of God, through faith granted to them from above; and likewise that they may be encouraged, consoled, and quickened, and enabled to live more above the world, and to be less of it, according as their present state may most require in each of their cases.

And if these foreshowings of a certain

future blessedness, all derived from holy Scripture, should fall into the hands of any of those pitiable persons who are as yet out of the narrow path which leads to the eternal city, of which the Lord has said that *few there be which find it*, may it be granted to them, by the powerful energy of the Holy Spirit, that by means of the thoughts here dropped into their minds, they may be induced to enter the only way which has the promise of the light of God's countenance here on earth, and of glory for evermore in the life to come!

May God's own presence and teaching be granted to all who open and close this book, so that they may find it to be a messenger of peace, hope, and holy joy, in Jesus Christ, who is the Saviour of sinners, and the helper of all them that put their trust in Him!

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction.



THE FUTURE LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS.

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INTRODUCTION.

LIFE in this world is a short span. Years slip away, and we verge on old age; then the past seems to be as nothing, while the time yet to come can be, in length, but a fraction of the time already gone. But life itself will continue evermore.

Again, life here on earth is chequered and variable; it has no secure hold of anything good. Even they whose fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,

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are continually reminded that their rest is not here. But in the life beyond, there is peace and the fulness of joy, and that too for ever.

The prospect of eternal life in happiness, when this short uncertain and restless life shall have reached its end, ought to exercise a powerful influence upon the Christian stranger and sojourner upon earth. The contemplation of his inheritance ought to minister to his steadfastness, and to his peace.

To the world at large, such an occupation appears to be nothing better than a dreamy gazing on things purely visionary. The things future are hidden from sight, and therefore many are content that they should be excluded from reflection. Busy men put away the subject as mere idle speculation, the issues of which may prove to be wide of the truth. They assume, without examination, that there is little in revelation for the mind to rest upon, and they judge that little to be most obscure, and of doubtful interpretation, and worthy of being passed over, in favour of more practical subjects. They do

not understand that the proper limits of research in such matters are simply the limits of God's revelations ; nor do they consider that it is the duty, and equally the privilege, of those who hold in their hands a revelation from God, to gather up all its communications, and to apply them to the use for which they were given.

It is often, though not always, otherwise with those who are building their hopes on Christ. They see that they have an interest in all that God has spoken ; and, in the matter of their eternal inheritance, their minds have accumulated rich treasures of thought. They are sure that Christ, by His precious blood, has purchased for them the choicest blessings to be enjoyed in that great future. They believe in a heaven which is to be the happy abode of all the redeemed. They foresee a blessedness which they are even now able to contemplate in some of its constituent parts. Yet it may be questioned whether the subject is as much present to their minds as it ought to be ; whether they realise as fully as would

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be good for them the things which shall be hereafter; whether they keep before the eyes of their minds, and the grasp of their affections, the revealed details of those happy scenes in which they hope to have their part hereafter. Do not too many, at least, hastily glance at the subject, and catch the more prominent features of the picture, to the omission of those which are rather to be discovered by examination than clearly seen at first sight? Is there not, even in their view, much that is general and vague, rather than a realising of the whole of what is revealed, produced by looking into it carefully, and point by point, so far as it is granted to a believer's eye to view it? These questions are asked under an impression that if Christian people kept before their eyes, as much as they ought to do it, the plain disclosures and the less obvious intimations of the coming blessedness, which God has been pleased to place in His Word, effects would be produced upon their hearts and minds of a special character. When sickness whispers to the Christian that

his transition from time to eternity may be at hand, his mind is often filled with these blessed anticipations, and you cannot fail to discern it. So also, in the evening of life, when the conviction is strong that the residue of days must be few, it is often seen that the approaching morning of the better life is discerned by the eye of faith, and awakens a desire for its arrival, mingled with thankfulness and joy. Ought these lively anticipations, so conducive to spiritual refreshment and to the elevation of the soul, to be left for the sick bed, and the chair of old age? Why should not their hallowing influences be felt, at all times, by those who have a good hope through grace?

With a desire of contributing, under God's blessing, to open a way for the descent of these influences, in all their fulness and power, into the minds of those who are heirs of the crown of life, an attempt will be made in the following chapters to trace out what God has taught concerning the future blessedness.

The only authority adduced will be that of

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Divine revelation, whether communicated by distinct declarations, or taught by intimations from which inferences may legitimately be deduced. Nothing will be drawn from human imagination, or from doubtful reasonings upon propositions whose certainty cannot be established. If this be less interesting and picturesque than a different treatment might prove, let it be remembered that it is folly to feed our hope upon fictions, and that nothing ought to content us but reality and indisputable truth.

CHAPTER II.

Active Service.

CHAPTER II.

ACTIVE SERVICE.

SOME of the largest and most glowing pictures of the heavenly state which are drawn in Holy Scripture, present to our view the assemblage of multitudes which cannot be numbered, gathered together, after the manner of a congregation. They sing hymns of joyful praise to the Redeemer of the whole Church, and to the Almighty Father, in whose presence they stand. They cast their crowns to the ground in acknowledgment of their unworthiness of any such distinctions as those to which they have been exalted. They truly and thankfully ascribe their salvation to the love of Christ. Their anthem is,

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—Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, His Father, to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

We can well understand that when the minds and hearts of redeemed men have been relieved from the burthen of the flesh, and have been made spiritual in a manner which none on earth can experience or even understand,—when they are freed from all imperfectness and sin, and are overflowing with joy in Christ,—such gatherings in the heavenly temple will be scenes of unalloyed delight, each worshipper feeling that all the rest are of the same heart and mind with himself, all filled with an intense consciousness of that love of Christ which it is their highest pleasure to celebrate.

They by whom worship in the earthly temple is chiefly regarded as a mere office and duty, may think of this occupation of the saints as oppressive, and wearisome through its sameness. But it is a mistake to judge

by present human feelings. The redeemed will have undergone a complete change at the Resurrection. They will have been perfectly adapted to the circumstances which are to belong to their endless life. Their Heavenly Father, in the exercise of His wisdom and love, will have provided that their employments, whatever they may be, shall minister to them the perfection of happiness.

But God's gracious unveilings of the future disclose to us that there will be other occupations of the redeemed besides that of joyful worship. This is, indeed, rather learned by necessary inference from what is revealed, than expressed by precise assertions. But some of the intimations which God has placed in His Word are too plain to be mistaken, and these serve to throw light on others which, if they stood alone, might have failed to yield us the same information. How much we owe for instruction in Divine truth to incidental assistance, derived from the comparison of one passage with another, they

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who carefully study the Holy Scriptures are very well aware.

There is a difficulty in the way of attaching a definite meaning to many of the expressions which the Divine Spirit has employed in speaking of the inheritance of the saints in light. They may be literal, and then they would show that the future state will be characterised by many things which belong to the present condition of man. Or they may be figurative; and if so, then a question arises as to the extent to which they are to be regarded as representing a state corresponding with the things by which they are described. But whatever method of interpretation may be employed, in order to ascertain the meaning of some terms which are now to be mentioned, this thought will remain unquestioned, that they suggest, not unceasing repose, but, activity, and not unbroken united worship only, but also occupation,—work to be done for God. There are many mansions,^a or more strictly, abodes;—there are everlasting habitations;^b

^a John xiv. 2.

^b Luke xvi. 9.

there is a city which He hath prepared for them;^a and St. John, in his vision, saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven,^b saw its foundations,^c and its walls,^d and its gates,^e its streets,^f and its river,^g and its tree,^h with healing leaves and bearing monthly fruits; the inhabitants are God's servants,ⁱ and His people;^j and His tabernacle is with them. This suggests a regulated and organised society, a citizenship in which there will be common relations to be fulfilled. There are not only crowns^l to be worn, which might only be badges of honour, but they shall reign for ever and ever,^m being placed in authority by Him who is their God; they may be rulers over many things,ⁿ over five cities, or ten.^o To whatever extent this may be regarded as figurative, it must be admitted at the very

^a Heb. xi. 16.

^b Rev. xxi. 2

^c Rev. xxi. 19.

^d Rev. xxi. 12.

^e Rev. xxi. 12.

^f Rev. xxii. 2.

^g Rev. xxii. 2.

^h Rev. xxii. 2.

ⁱ Rev. xxii. 3.

^j Rev. xxi. 3.

^k Rev. xxi. 3.

^l 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^m Rev. xxii. 5.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 21, 23.

^o Luke xix. 17, 18.

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least to suggest a trust committed to them, a work to be done; and the mind that carefully revolves what is written, seems to be set in motion by it to make its way through the universe, God's inconceivably vast creation, and to find spheres innumerable for doing God's will in ways which He will appoint, but which now we cannot foresee and could not comprehend.

So many expressions suggestive of activity and work will probably incline some minds to think that an assigned duty is signified by the declaration, "and His servants shall serve Him."^a The word "servants" has been already referred to, but it may further be noticed that it expresses a relation and an office in which the fulfilment of another's will is necessarily involved. As pointing to ministrations, in carrying the Lord's purposes into effect, that name of the saints would be most expressive. Were it not for their being also distinguished by other titles, and having other representations of their state, and being assured of God's unbounded love for them, it

^a Rev. xxii. 3.

might even have told of excessive and burthen-some toil. But enough is taught to convince us that whatever the work may be, it will be a labour of love, and fruitful of peace and joy. Here, however, it is declared that they shall serve Him, and the question is, whether what is predicated of them relates only to worship, as in Rev. vii. 15, where the white-robed saints, who have come out of great tribulation, are described as serving God day and night in His temple; or whether the term His servants, and such representations of their state and occupations as have just been mentioned, will not justify our understanding the word for "serve" in its primary meaning of doing service, or rendering obedience in the fulfilment of God's will. In itself the word contains nothing to limit its meaning to acts of worship. It signifies any kind, and, indeed, every kind, of service; and considering the noun which is employed, it would be receiving less than the words seem to have been intended to convey, if we did not understand them to signify that God's servants, in

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their state of everlasting blessedness, will find at least some portion of their happiness in doing work for Him, under the guidance of His gracious instructions.

It may be that unceasing devotion in His presence, the accord of heart and voice in praising and glorifying the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, One eternal God, will be the highest, holiest, and happiest of all the services to which the heirs of salvation can be called. Who can judge of such things by any powers of perception which man at present possesses? Who is qualified to put one element into the scale, and after weighing it against others, to pronounce which will prove the greatest? God has assured perfect happiness to all His saints, and whether they be employed in active service or in holy worship, it will want nothing for its completeness, there will be no sighing for something else, and there can be no weariness. But we are permitted to inquire into the subject, so far as it has pleased God to open to us sources of knowledge; and some of the things which

He has caused to be written for our learning suggest that there will be other occupations for the glorified saints besides that of unceasing and joyful worship.

The idea of an active service receives much countenance from what God has been pleased to make known by His Word concerning Himself. The Lord Jesus, in defending Himself from the reproaches of certain unbelieving Jews, when they condemned Him for curing the cripple on a Sabbath day, said, "My Father *worketh* hitherto, and I work."^a Throughout God's vast creation, which we cannot attempt to survey without being confounded by its immensity, we learn that His power is always in active exercise. All the properties of nature owe their continuity, as well as their origin, to Him. He *worketh hitherto*. That He needs no helpers or underworkers is certain. But He is pleased to employ a subordinate agency; His purposes in so doing must be beneficent; it must be ordered, in part at least, for the happiness of those to whom He gives His commission.

^a John v. 17.

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Those innumerable suns, which are to our eyes but points of light, the stars of heaven, may each have its system of planets, and in and around each of them there may be work to be done and sustained. This we know for certain, that in some work here upon earth myriads of holy angels are employed. In the Psalms they are described as God's "ministers," or servants,—His servants who serve Him. In other parts of the Old Testament we read of their having a work of ministry upon earth. How startling was the disclosure of their presence to Elisha's servant,^a when the Lord opened his eyes that he might see what was really around him. The New Testament also ascribes to them a service rendered to God here on earth. They heralded Christ's coming,^b they ministered to Him after his temptation;^c and evermore, while the world lasts, they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.^d

^a 2 Kings vi. 17.

^c Matt. iv. 11.

^b Matt. i 20; Luke ii. 9.

^d Heb. i. 14.

The unwearied energy of God, and His employment of angels in doing His will, combine to throw light—we may think it a strong light—on the revelation given to us concerning the employments of Christ's redeemed, in the life to come. They assist us to attach a distinct and interesting meaning to the promise that His servants shall serve Him. It is not given to us to fix on the places and scenes, or on the kind of service which they may be appointed to render. That further knowledge is still reserved within the mind of God. But the whole of this world is His. He also telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names. Great is the Lord, and great is His power; yea, and His wisdom is infinite; yea, and His mercy is over all His works. In the boundless scenes of the operation of His power, He deigns to employ ministering spirits; and therein His servants, redeemed unto Him by the blood of Christ, may have regions assigned to them in which they too shall serve Him, and shall find their happiness in work to which He shall have appointed them.

There is one dignified office, touched upon already, which is promised to them by the word of a faithful God, and which seems to require a larger sphere for its exercise than would be found in the abiding place even of all the redeemed from amongst mankind. It is that of being kings, reigning with Christ. True, this may be but a title of honour ; but if it be also expressive of functions, then it seems to point to some domain or province in which authority is to be exercised. When they are as the angels of God in respect of their bodily conformation, they may also be made like them as principalities and powers.

It is not then a mere guess, or a fond speculation arising out of a wish, that points to active service in the fulfilment of the will of God, as likely to constitute a fruitful source of happiness to those whom Christ hath redeemed unto God.

In harmony with this expectation is the testimony of experience, that those who faithfully dedicate themselves and their talents to the glory of God, have a foretaste of such

happiness even here upon earth. When they are seeking to do His will, new springs of comfort, peace, and joy, burst up on all sides of them ; and many springs, from which others only draw waters of bitterness, are either wholly dried up for them, or healed into sweetness and refreshing virtue.

Even looking to that kind of labour which has no direct tendency to promote the knowledge of God's name and will, even looking to the work in life which God's providence has assigned to each man in order to his procuring earthly sustenance and comfort, it becomes a service of God when it is carried on in His love and fear, and in faith resting on His promises. The Lord, in His word, not only condemns idleness, but expresses His approval of honest labour. He who declared that man, after the fall, should eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, has honoured with His praise the hand of the diligent. And if the mechanic and the labourer, the clerk, the designer, the master, and the professional man, if all who gain their livelihood by work, either of muscle

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or of brain, recognize God's will, and the obligations of duty to Him in their several employments, those employments assume a new and almost sacred aspect, however common in themselves. Prosecuting the work of their lives, not with eye service as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God,—desiring that He should go forth with them to their work and labour from morning till evening, fulfilling their daily task in His fear, and regarding it as appointed for them by Him,—seeking from Him wisdom and strength, and being careful to do nothing, under any circumstances, of which He disapproves, they find an evil which came by the fall, to be converted into a blessing. The necessary work which a man has to do in this world is transformed into a service of God; and God owns “His servants,” serving Him, where the world sees nothing but the plough, the spade, or the hammer, the purchase, the ledger, the lawyer's deed, or the physician's prescription.

But this is not the only service on which

God's blessing may be found to rest. Some opportunities of serving Him in a more direct manner will arise, even in the most toilsome vocation. His will may be done, and something may be effected towards the extension of His kingdom, by an example thoughtfully regulated, by the kindly and profitable word spoken in season, by a wise upholding of God's truth, or by an express disapproval of such sentiments and conduct as are contrary to His law. By these or the like means, a more direct beginning may be made, even though it be poor and faint, of the service which we have been regarding as one of the highest privileges of the saints in their glorified state.

And some there are, indeed not a few in this prosperous land, who are spared from the necessity of toiling in any way for their maintenance in this world, to whom no special occupations seem to be providentially assigned by their position in society, and who therefore might make the direct service of God their business, instead of simply waiting to render it when an opportunity invites them. Assu-

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ming them first to be indeed His servants, we see at once what a wide and necessitous field is open to them, only perplexing by its variety and expanse, in which to advance the honour of their Master's name, and to be a blessing to their fellow men, by promoting their interests in time and eternity. O London, head quarters of so many spiritual and temporal charities, but also sad metropolis of misery and sin, can any one in thee, or near thee, fail to find full occupation for a life, if he would spend it in doing good? And where is the retired hamlet in which or near which God's servants may not render to Him a service doubly blest, by ministering with hearty devotedness to the welfare of their fellow men?

But in all this service there is alloy, for it is done by imperfect agents, in a fallen world. How exquisite the delight of rendering service, chosen for them as a privilege by the love of their heavenly Father, and assigned to just men made perfect, when they are beyond the reach of disappointment and sorrow, and where no shadow of evil can pass over their happiness!

CHAPTER III.

Worship.

CHAPTER III.

WORSHIP.

IN one of those visions which it pleased God in His wisdom and goodness to employ, in order to make a prophetic communication to St. John,^a there was a glorious throne, and One was seen sitting upon it, holding in His right hand one of those rolls of parchment which served the purpose for which, in our own days, books are employed. That mighty One was God. The book was seen to be sealed with seven seals. An angel came forward to ask, Who was worthy to open the

^a Rev. v.

book, and to loose its seals? and none arose, from heaven or earth, who could open the book, or even venture to look upon it.

Deeply distressed in mind, on finding that what God was willing to disclose was nevertheless to be withholden from his knowledge, the Apostle wept much, because there was none to unroll the book. The preceding chapter tells of four-and-twenty elders, as forming part of the company of heaven; and one of these now witnessing and pitying his sorrow, spoke to him to comfort him, and said, —“Weep not; Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

Thus the angel's challenge was accepted. One was found who was worthy to undertake the work which was judged to be so awful. It was the Lord Jesus Christ. By descent He belonged to the tribe of Judah, whose standard was a Lion. He was the Shiloh, promised to Judah amidst the blessings of Jacob, who pronounced that son to be a

Lion's whelp. But He was also the Root of David; and herein He may be Himself an expositor of the angel's words. In the last chapter of the Revelation, having announced Himself by the gracious name of Jesus, He said,—“I am the Root and the Offspring of David,” in evident reference to the words of Isaiah,^a “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots;” as also to the prophecy of the 10th verse of the same chapter, “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people.” This prophecy is quoted by St. Paul as having its fulfilment in Christ.^b “And again Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles trust.”

Having heard such an announcement from an angel's voice, the favoured Apostle might next have expected to behold some dignified personage standing forth, decked with light as

^a Isaiah xi. 1.

^b Rom. xv. 12.

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with a garment, and clothed with majesty and honour. But lo! it was far otherwise. The spot to which his eyes were directed was, indeed, the place of highest distinction in all the whole heaven. It was no other than the throne of God. Around it were the four living creatures who, in these remarkable scenes, appear to have represented all that hath life, amongst the works of God. There were also the four-and-twenty elders, in whom we may discern representatives of the Church of the redeemed (including God's saints under the Mosaic dispensation, as well as those who lived in the days of the Son of Man); but in the midst of these, and of the throne, stood, not a stately Lion, much less One whom all could see to belong to a higher order of beings, such as might take the lion for their emblem and sign,—not a robed and sceptred king, evidently fulfilling the great things spoken of old concerning the promised Son of David; no! but a Lamb,—the Greek word most correctly signifies a little Lamb;—and upon that little Lamb were marks which

showed that though He was now alive He had been slain. It was even He who was to unfold the book which none other in the universe was worthy to open.

He also bore marks upon Him which proved that He was no ordinary Lamb, but peculiar, and pre-eminent in greatness. He had seven horns, emblems of perfect and therefore irresistible power and dominion. He had seven eyes, emblems of the seven Spirits of God, which represent the perfection of Divine knowledge, for they are sent forth into all the earth.* He,—He who alone was worthy,—took the book; and then, in the first place, the representatives of creation and of redemption broke forth in His praise;—then came a chorus of angels, ten thousand times ten thousand in number, and thousands of thousands; and the words of their harmonious psalm were,—“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

In order to our fully apprehending this

* Rev. v. 6.

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remarkable scene, we must needs examine it yet more closely. Instead of the Lion of power, we seem to be looking upon the Lamb of weakness, the little Lamb which had been slain. But He is not weak. There are His eyes, which tell of unbounded knowledge. He is declared by the act of the Most High, as well as by the praises of created beings, to be worthy, for to Him only is the book committed by the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne. The song of those holy persons, once the sons of men, but now the children and saints of God, is addressed to Him, and renders to Him special praise,—“For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on earth.” In the grander chorus which follows, it is the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain which is celebrated. But hark! The voices swell out in yet higher and nobler strains. All creation adds its harmonies. Every creature in heaven, on

earth, and under the earth, and also in the sea, joins with the redeemed and with the holy angels. And the song is an ascription of blessing and glory, for ever and ever, to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

It is revealed that in the future day to which the whole church militant is ever looking with hope and desire, one great and glorious sanctuary will be constituted, in which the Lord will receive unceasing adoration and joyful praise. We have now been witnesses, through the Apostle's eyes at least, of such a service. And what is it that stands out most prominently in the picture? Might it not be answered in the words of the martyr Stephen, when the clamouring Jews were venting their fury upon Him,—“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of MAN standing on the right hand of God!” only with this difference, that when all these praises wait upon Him, He is the Lamb, the Lamb that was slain, the little Lamb, and yet unspeakably glorious.

The Church falls down before Him in adoration; the strains of music and the odours of incense celebrate His presence; and the thankful acknowledgment, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood!" declares the treasured thought which demands utterance in endless praises.

It seemed good to the eternal Spirit to impart to the Church on earth this knowledge of heavenly worship. The concluding chapters of the Revelation give further insight into it (yet but a little way), as it will be conducted after the day of judgment, when Christ will be glorified in His saints. "I saw no temple therein,"—and yet there was a temple,—“for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it.” There is the throne of God and of the Lamb. For anything like the observances of worship we must go for suggestions to the scene already described. But in the later picture, as well as the earlier, Christ is presented to the eye of the Church as the Lamb. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of

the new Jerusalem. The Lamb is the light of the city. The dwellers therein are they who are written in the Lamb's book of life. The crystal river proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

It is good for us to remember this conspicuous feature of the worship in which those are to unite who have been received into the everlasting habitations of the city of God. There is something expressive and instructive in the subject of their hymn of praise being the Lamb which was slain, and who redeemed them to God by His blood. It was through the shedding of that blood that admittance into the city was obtained for them. Excepting for its efficacy, not one of them would have entered those gates. Each, through the merit of that sacrifice, had his sins forgiven, and found acceptance, and pardon, and peace with God. And still, without cessation, that mercy and love are remembered and celebrated, and we seem to be taught that the name of the Lamb will never be forgotten.

* Rev. xxi. 22, 23, 27; xxii. 1.

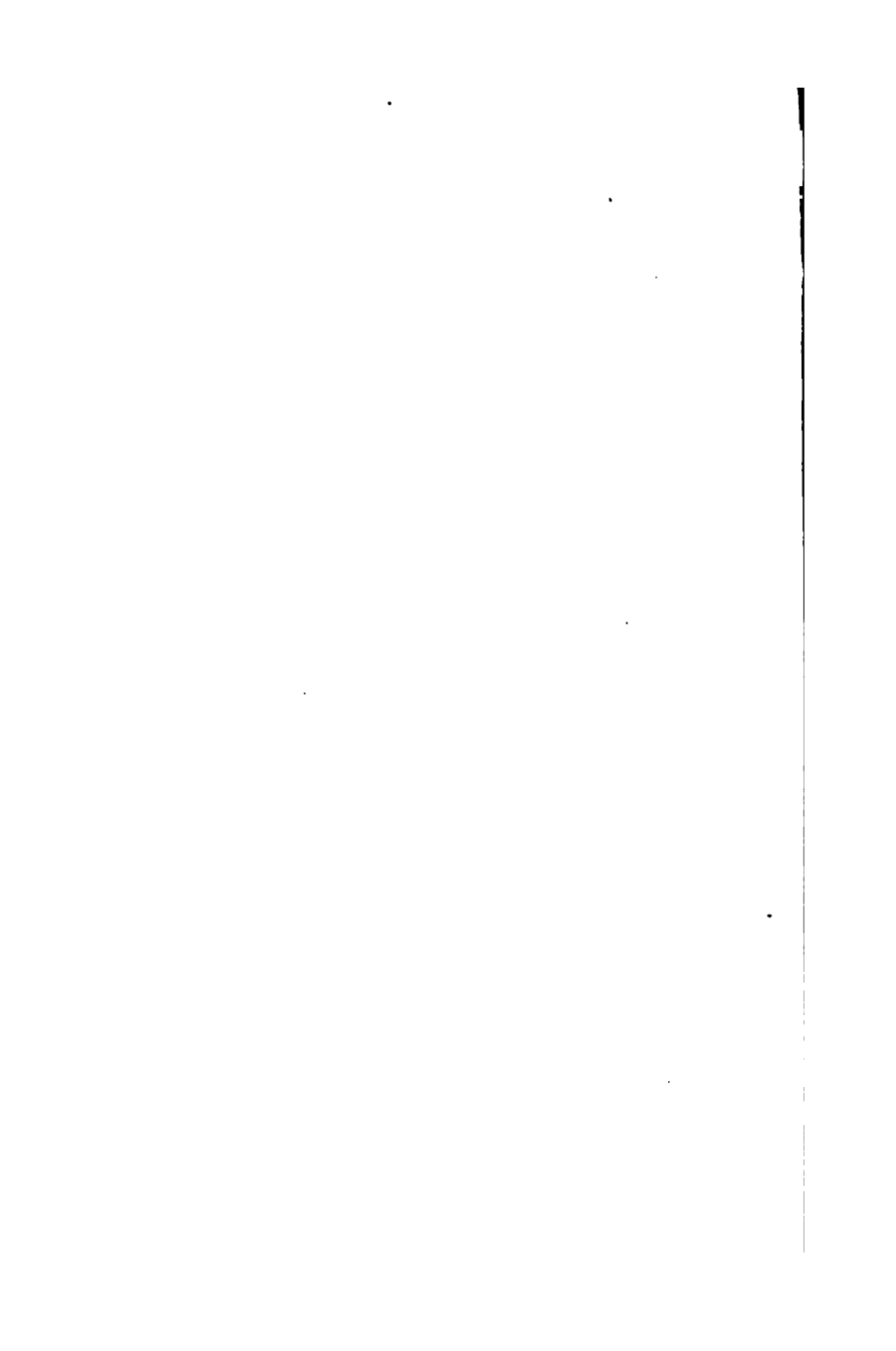
Ought not the thoughts of men on earth to be in harmony with the psalmody of the redeemed in glory? And yet how few are they whose hearts really overflow with gratitude and delight, in the remembrance of Christ's love and condescension, and of the efficacy of His atonement for sin! Surely many, who are far from neglecting that great salvation, nay, who value it and rest their hopes upon it, and who sing "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood,"—as a hymn sweet to their souls,—yet know and lament that there is but little of this heavenly ardour within them to give life to their strains of praise. The heart which is really attuned to such melodies is that which is in perfect unison with the Apostle's outburst of Christian faith and feeling,—

What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless; and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ,

and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know Him. Phil. iii. 7—10.

CHAPTER IV.

The Communion of Saints.



CHAPTER IV.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

THE mysteries of the life beyond the grave are hidden from the researches of human reason. There are no ascertained facts on which it can rest its arguments. For all the knowledge which we can trust, we are indebted to God's revelation. Therein He has declared what His purposes are, with regard to the whole human race; and He has recorded His sure promises to those whose sins are forgiven, and who, through Christ, are to be graced with an everlasting crown of righteousness.

With regard to the happiness into the full enjoyment of which they are to be admitted, it has pleased God to unfold much, which it is

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intensely interesting to contemplate. Much also that we might desire to know is wrapped around in a mantle of darkness, through which no eye can penetrate. Into that which is written for our comfort and encouragement, it is our privilege and our duty to look with reverent minds. Towards that which is only partially unveiled we must turn in a spirit of humility and submission, but at the same time of unwavering confidence in our God, believing that His love, His wisdom, and His power will be united in providing whatever will be most conducive to the happiness of the saints in their blessed resting places.

The subject to which this chapter is appropriated stands midway between those which are announced by distinct declarations, and those which are wholly left to be discovered in that day when the saints, instead of knowing only in part, shall know even as they are known.

There is no direct or express teaching on the subject of the association of the redeemed one with another. But the fact that they

will live together, and that they will be a society or community, rises up before us in the Word of God so often, that we may well thank Him for disclosing as much as is necessary to satisfy our earnest desires and hopes, on a subject so important to our peace of mind. Will not the redeemed find a portion of their happiness in intercourse one with another? Will not friends and relations be once more bound together in affection? Will not those who on earth belonged to various generations, perhaps far apart from each other, delight to find themselves in one another's happy presence? These are questions to which none who ever meditate on the eternal world can possibly be indifferent. Let us consider what answer to them can be derived from the only safe authority.

Assuredly God has taught us to expect His own presence, and that of His dear Son Jesus Christ, to be far more prized by His redeemed people than any other intercourse which they can enjoy.

Here on earth, any manifestation of that

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presence would be awful, nay overwhelming, even to the soul that has tasted most of His graciousness. The remembrance of sin, and therefore of unworthiness, would leave no room for joy or even peace. But when the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit are finished and perfected, there will be nothing to make a sense of the Divine presence anything else but blessedness. He who is washed pure from every spot and stain of sin, and whose affections have been made perfectly holy by divine grace, will be enabled to stand, with reverence indeed, but also with joy, even in the holy presence of God.

But the Scriptures afford sufficient ground for believing that the just, made perfect, will also find a part of their satisfaction in communion one with another.

Such revealed facts as that they will be made perfect, and that everything which can minister to their happiness will be provided for them, encourage such an expectation. That intercourse would be, to our present apprehension at least, a source of intense pleasure. On

the other hand, if the saints dwelt together in one city, without knowing one another, or even without interest in one another, their state, so far as we can now judge, would scarcely be that of those who are made perfect.

Natural, however, as are these inferences from certain general expressions found in God's holy word, they warrant no stronger conclusion than this, that it is probable that the saints will be placed in happy communion one with another. For it is necessary to admit, as a possible counterpoise to the argument, that it is within the compass of God's power to make the condition of His people perfect, without introducing into it the elements which we, with our present faculties and feelings, may judge to be essential to its completeness.

Let us then go on to remember that the redeemed are represented as united together in the same occupations, especially in that of worshipping God, and of singing the self-same language of adoration and praise. The Lord Jesus, when He was making intercession for His disciples, in the remarkable prayer which

He offered up for them, before He went for the last time to the garden of Gethsemane, besought His Father, saying, *Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me.* This prayer will doubtless be fulfilled; and it is difficult to understand how those who have been delivered from all the imperfections which now occasionally militate against mutual interest, and unqualified affection, amongst friends and relations, but who equally rest on the same Saviour's love, should so worship together, and so contemplate together the glory of the Lamb, who hath taken away their sins, and yet be in a state of perfect apathy with reference to each other, and perhaps ignorant of one another's presence. They are to be brought together, as a company of disciples, around the Lord Jesus; they are to join together in holy worship in His glorious temple; they are to be associated as ministering servants, doing the will of Him who worketh hitherto, and still will work, as the Creator

and upholder of all things. Now these disclosures of united action appear to tell of unity of heart and mind, of fellow feeling and mutual interest.

Some weight may also be allowed to attach to the manner in which this kind of interest, and the expectation of its continuance in the future state, have been felt by God's acknowledged people on earth, and placed on record as if for the very purpose of encouraging us, who remain, to cherish the same anticipations. David's child was taken from him, and what was his consolation? *I shall go to him!* St. Paul regarded his converts as his joy and crown, not in this life only, but in the great assembly of the saints. *What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at His coming?* Even after recognising the time to which he points as being the day of Christ's appearing, can we think that he supposed that afterwards his pleasure in them would cease, his knowledge of them vanish away?

To these considerations may be added, a

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remembrance of what is revealed concerning the state of those other dwellers in the presence of God, the holy angels. Doubtless it is but little that we know of their condition. But that little may serve to let in some rays of light on the future state of the persons who have been redeemed from amongst the children of men. We may turn to this view of the case the rather, because probably the only argument we ever heard against the happiness of the saints in one another, rests upon the words which our blessed Lord spake, when He was comparing the condition of the redeemed with that of the angels in heaven.

The Sadducees, the sceptics of that day, who denied that there will be any resurrection of the dead, imagined that they addressed to our Lord a perplexing question, when they asked Him whose wife she should be who in this life had seven husbands in succession? His answer was, *Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God. For when they shall rise from the dead they neither marry, nor are given in marriage,*

but are as the angels which are in heaven.^a The whole condition of man, in his glorified state, will be changed. There will be no death, and no succession of generations. But our Lord neither plainly says nor remotely hints that amongst the angels there is no companionship, no sympathy, no accord in their work for God.

From other places, in which we see examples of their interposition amongst men, we learn that they are employed together in doing God's work. One of their distinctive titles is the expressive one of God's "host," which is inconsistent with the idea of isolation. And that they unite in sympathy with men, as well as in love to God, is evident from the very language of their song of praise when Christ was born, and from their always rejoicing together over one sinner that repenteth.

Amongst the means granted to us by God's goodness for gaining a knowledge of this interesting subject, when we earnestly and humbly seek it, we find one in the manner in which some of the eminent saints are presented

^a Mark xii. 24, 25.

to view in relation to another world. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared together talking with Jesus on the mount, and spoke with Him of an event, then future, in which they were both equally interested,—the things which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, even His death, as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

On another occasion, when the Lord was speaking of the state of the redeemed, He brought upon the scene, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as if they were always together, but also as to be the companions of those who should be admitted into the divine presence. *Ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God.**

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, shows to us a poor and neglected sufferer borne away from all his earthly sorrows, and carried by angels to a haven of rest. And where is this but in *Abraham's* bosom?

This latter, doubtless, is the figurative language of a parable; and of the nature of a

* Luke xiii. 28.

parable may also be the Lord's reproof, cited just before, as addressed to his opposers. Yet still, after every allowance made for the peculiarities of this method of teaching, there remains enough to strengthen the believer's expectation that amongst the sources of joy reserved for him in the future on which his hope is fixed, will be companionship with the rest of God's people; a happiness not enjoyed alone and without sympathy, but partly at least produced by a consciousness of partnership and mutual interest in the same inheritance, in that light of glory.

The same expectation has a foundation of much strength in the way in which the saints in that world are represented as belonging to a regularly constituted and organised community. Let us not, while thoughtfully engaged in this enquiry, forget that the small amount of our knowledge of things beyond the grave, requires us to walk amidst these scenes with caution, and to remember that it is easy for us to fall into mistakes. But while we are alive to this our liability to error, it is lawful for us to give

full consideration and weight to the fact, that in the great scene which closes the Revelation, a city is described; and that it is declared to be the city in which the saints are to enjoy happiness and safety for ever. Other expressions, being of the nature of illustrations, convey the same idea to our minds. Our Lord spoke to His disciples of many mansions prepared for them, and of His Father's house. These various terms agree in suggesting that they will dwell together; and if there be a city, it implies an organised society. We ask ourselves, can this be a gathering of those who shall always remain strangers to one another? Independently of all other considerations, it would appear to be scarcely possible. When we further remember the great care and love of God for His people, it seems to stand as a truth which cannot be questioned. But in the closing scene of the Revelation, we find more than the mere fact that there will be a city for the redeemed to dwell in. It has been carefully prepared for them, and comes down from God out of heaven. It has its inhabitants,

and its King. There are its gates and streets, and its flowing river. It has its own special light to shine in and upon it, its protection from the intrusion of even one unworthy inhabitant. It is occupied by those only whose names are in the book of life. God dwells with them. They are His people, and He is their God. Can they be unknown to each other? Can they be in a condition to feel no ties of relationship of any kind amongst themselves? Such at least is not the thought which these visions convey to the mind of a devout reader. He does not picture to himself a peopled city as made practically a solitude to its inhabitants. And when the patriarchs felt that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, and went on their way seeking a heavenly country, and believing that God had prepared for them a city, and when in this faith they died, they appear to be described as expecting to meet at last, and to dwell together in a blessed common home.

St. Paul also helps us in our enquiry, by speaking of a partnership in future blessedness

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as awaiting God's people. He gives honour to the Almighty Father, because it is the work of His goodness to make men meet to be *partakers* of the inheritance of the saints in light. The expression which he uses, might indeed only signify their receiving their portion of those good things ; but it is more natural to understand it as not pointing to an inheritance apart, which should be enjoyed in solitude, but to one which is to be shared after the manner of a partnership in such blessedness.

There is yet another suggestion made in Holy Scripture, (and indeed there may be more, such as other minds may rejoice to have discovered,) which helps to satisfy us that there will be this communion of the saints in their final dwelling place. There is the remarkable chapter on charity.* This charity means love to one another. It is something much greater, much higher, much deeper, much holier, much more genuine, than mere almsgiving, which is so commonly called charity. Of it, St. Paul teaches that it shall never fail, where he

* 1 Cor. xiii.

plainly means that it shall never cease, or come to an end. Faith and hope will expire when the objects on which they have been fixed are realised. But love will continue for ever. It will go with the redeemed into the Lord's presence ; it will not depart from them at their journey's end ; it will still abide in their hearts when all that is in them is made perfect. Will it not thus survive as a bond of brotherhood ? If it is then to be refined into perfectness, will it not surpass the strongest love which can now unite God's people in this world of weakness and sin ?

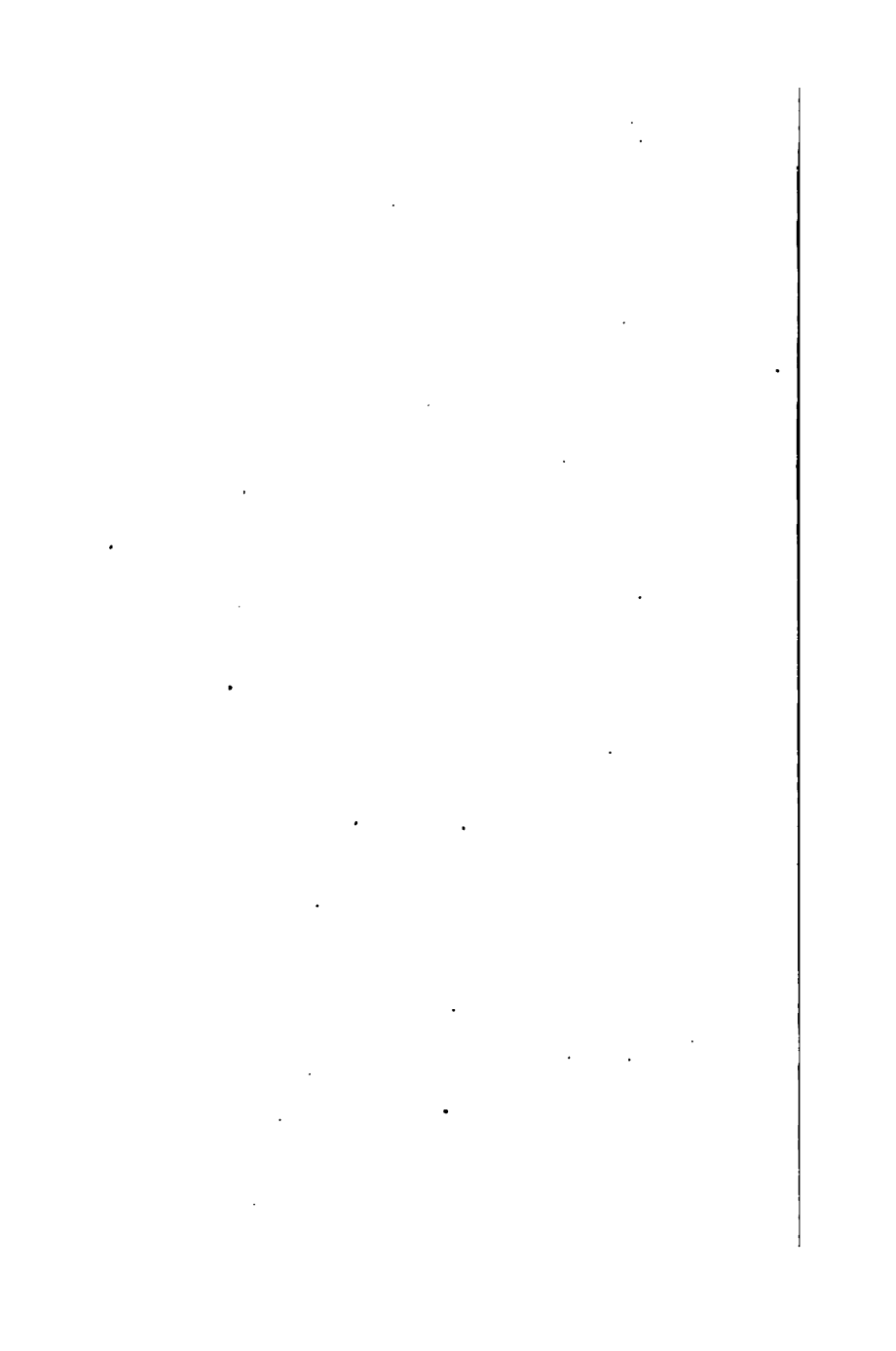
The future blessedness, contemplated from this point of view, has a strong attractive power. There may be our father or mother, or both, in heaven, and many another dear relation and friend, who was dear also to Christ, and of whose safety in Him we cannot admit of a doubt. And constituted as we are, we see in this truth a holy allurements to seek to dwell where they are for ever. Their hand seems to be stretched out, and their finger first beckons to us, and then points to the city in

which, through Christ's loving mercy, we may dwell with them through endless ages.

But also there is, in this hope, a motive to the cultivation of brotherly love here on earth, in families, amongst friends, and throughout the whole Church of Christ, the community of His people. The love that is to be perfected in the future state, is in terms represented as having its first existence in this present world. If in any mind a doubt exists on this point, let it betake itself to the thoughtful examination of St. John's epistles.

Furthermore, the truth which we have now sought out, brings a most welcome consolation to many an afflicted spirit. Amongst the sorrows which are more or less intermixed with man's portion here below, but which will be unknown in the eternal city, there is one which is often very bitter, the death of those we love. But if they and we, loving Christ, are His, that city will bring us together again. Christ's presence will indeed be the chief delight of that state, and will add preciousness to every other blessing; but of the

joys which He will then illuminate with the light of his countenance, one will be, if this chapter be not a mistake, a renewal and consecration of the love which had first bound hearts together upon earth. It is a great consolation to foresee this in the sorrowful time of parting. It is delightful to think of it at all times. How wonderfully blessed the realisation of it, when it will be perfect, and for ever !



CHAPTER V.

The Glorified Body.

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THE GLORIFIED BODY.

WE may well believe that in the future state there will be much which our present faculties, knowledge, and experience would fail to enable us to understand, however fully it might be described. One portion of St. Paul's own history may serve for an illustration. It was once granted to him to be, for a short space of time, in the glorious abode of the Lord God Almighty.* Whether he was in the body or out of the body, at that awful moment, he could not tell. But he was caught up to the third heaven, which he also

* 2 Cor. xii.

calls Paradise. He does not attempt to describe the scene which he witnessed in this vision and revelation of the Lord. The only account of it which he gives is that he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

If we consider the nature of the subject, and how small is our capacity for receiving any ideas of it, excepting such as have some relation to things which are seen, we shall not wonder at the method adopted by the Holy Spirit for instructing us respecting the world to come. The basis is something which we already know; and to a great extent the end is accomplished by teaching that whatever things are sources of trouble in this life will be altogether shut out from the life to come.

There are, indeed, also some general representations, and some positive statements, but they are far fewer than those of a negative kind. A voice out of heaven said to St. John, in a few simple words which announce a marvellous change, *The former things are passed*

away.* The revelation was made yet more remarkable by the further declaration, *Behold, I make all things new*. But here, of detail there is none. We are only told of the entire freshness of that coming creation, and of the exclusion from it for ever of all the imperfections under which God's handy-work is now constrained to groan and travail in pain.

So will it be with the personal condition of the saints;—the former things will have passed away, and all will be new.

In the present chapter, God's revelation concerning the body in which the saints will hereafter be clothed is to be considered. But if the mind and the body are here noticed separately, it is important to remember how intimately these two constituent parts of man are now connected with each other, exercising a mutual influence; so that the thought of either one of these cannot be wholly detached from a recollection of the other. The tears which are shed express mental suffering

* Rev. xxi. 4.

more frequently than bodily distress and anguish. Nevertheless, we may have the whole truth more clearly before us if, to such extent as is possible, we consider in succession the future condition of the body and the future condition of the mind.

God's holy Word distinctly reveals that the soul will again, after the resurrection, be clothed with a body, its tabernacle, a house not made with hands. But of its fashion, its component parts, its nature, the Scriptures teach nothing which could convey to us any definite ideas. Nay, rather we are told that it doth not yet appear what we shall be;* while, to a degree truly comforting, we are assured of exemption from particular evils, and generally from everything that could interfere with our comfort and enjoyment.

If, in humble faith, and in a submissive spirit of inquiry, we search the Scriptures on this somewhat obscure subject, there are certain important points which we may be satisfied that our God has been pleased to settle for us.

* 1 John iii. 2.

1. The body in which the Spirit is to dwell in the mansions of glory, will bear an intimate relation to the body, which was its habitation here below. We read of the graves being opened; of the sea giving up the dead that are therein; and of all that are in the graves hearing the voice which summons them, and coming forth to stand before the Lord. This connection between the mortal body which perishes and that which is raised from the dead is shown and illustrated by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xv. 37,—*That which thou sowest (the corn of wheat) is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed His own body;*—intimating that this our mortal body will be taken, by God's wonder-working power, for the seed of the body which is to stand before Him in the resurrection at the last day, and in which His saints will dwell before Him from thenceforth even for ever.

II. But it is also revealed that the body will be greatly changed ; and some particulars of the change which it will undergo are unfolded to the believer's view. What is said of the resurrection, and of eternal life, implies that the bodies of the risen saints will be material, visible, and such as may be touched and felt. But it is as plainly declared that the resurrection body will not be flesh and blood.^a We shall all be changed, corruption will not inherit incorruption, but the corruptible will put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality.^b To this effect speak other words written in the same remarkable and comforting portion of God's holy word. *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption ; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*^c The apostle immediately adds,—*There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body ;* and although no explanation is given of

^a 1 Cor. xv. 50.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 42-44.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 50-53.

what a spiritual body is, and the expression itself conveys no definite idea, yet there is enough to show that it will be something very different from man's present body of flesh and blood, and in some measure in contrast with it, being adapted to the predominance of his spirit, no longer a burthen to the higher nature, but in perfect harmony with it.

This is a great mystery, from which the veil is only partially raised.

The blessedness, as well as the greatness of this change, is signified by St. Paul in certain memorable expressions which he uses in his Epistle to the Romans, when he describes the disciples of Christ in this world as groaning within themselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, saith he, *the redemption of our body*.*

III. The most assuring and comforting view of the future bodily state of the redeemed is contained in the promise that when Christ shall appear He will *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*

* Rom. viii. 28.

*according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.** The body of the saints, in their eternal habitations, will be fashioned or moulded into a resemblance to the body of the Lord. This is the greatest and most satisfying revelation with regard to their bodily state. To be like Him is enough, even if they were unable to make any discovery as to the nature of the body wherewith He is clothed. And, indeed, it is only a little that can be known. We must be content with the fact, though the circumstances be hidden from our knowledge.

There was something peculiar and mysterious in the manner of our Lord's abode on earth, between His resurrection and ascension. He did not live with His disciples. For days together He did not appear amongst them. He could visit them when they were assembled with closed doors. He could become invisible when the interview was over. No record remains of where He passed one single night. Yet we hear nothing of daz-

* Phil. iii. 21.

zling glory in His appearance; He could eat of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb; a disciple might put his fingers into the print of the nails; and He had flesh and bones which all might see. What are we to think of His body then? Was it the glorious body, in likeness to which that of His people is to be fashioned? Possibly it was. He may have veiled its glory, if the glory was partly of a visible nature. But the flesh and bones? there is difficulty here, for He had flesh and bones, whereas He taught that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But either these elements of the body may have been in a changed and renewed condition, or that part of the great physical transition may have been left incomplete until His ascension. The partaking of food is not attributed to necessity, it seems rather to have been designed to prove that He was not a mere phantom; and we know that the angels partook of the hospitality of Abraham, and, therefore, that at least for angelic bodies such an act would not have been impossible.

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But even supposing, as is highly probable, that this was an intermediate stage, perhaps much advanced, between the body of His flesh which could suffer, and the glorified body in which He would be seated on His Father's throne, certain things transpire which serve to throw light on the future bodily state of the saved. He could show Himself, or cause Himself to be visible. He could disappear, or vanish out of sight. He could present Himself to His disciples in Galilee or in Judea, not accompanying them on their journey.

Finally, He could rise from the earth, ascend into the clouds of heaven, and press through them into His Father's presence. Does not St. Paul's language authorise our believing that the bodies of His people will be like to His, by being in possession of similar properties?

Before leaving this part of the subject, let us refresh our minds by returning to that which is declared with certainty. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not*

*yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**

iv. Reference has already been made to those words of our blessed Lord, in which He speaks of the children of the resurrection as being equal unto the angels.^b The language is not definite enough to warrant our drawing any decided inference with regard to the body in which the sons of God will then be clothed. But it is not irrelevant to notice that angels, visible to the human eye, kept the entrance of Paradise; that some of those heavenly beings, having all the appearance of men, rested and took refreshment with Abraham, spoke with Daniel, and could fly swiftly to him, declared Christ's birth to the shepherds, and then sang the praises of God in strains and language which men could hear, and that on other occasions they were seen under circumstances which prove that their bodies were capable of rapid movement, and were more subtle by far in their elements than human flesh and blood.

* 1 John iii. 2.

^b Luke xx. 36.

v. It is a welcome consideration to all who know what is meant by "the burthen of the flesh," that it has pleased God, in His great condescension to our weakness, to make known that the glorified bodies of His people in Paradise will be wholly exempted from all the evils under which, in our present state, we are liable to suffer.

The misery of want, the craving for food as a necessity, will be for ever unknown. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.* The physical trials produced by temperature shall have ceased, *the sun shall not light on them, nor any heat.*^a There will be no sense of weariness, no longing for repose, no groaning under any burthen of the flesh.^b Night, now so welcome to the man who labours, whether with sinew or brain, will be then neither needed nor known;^c *neither shall there be any more pain;*^d decay and exhaustion will be impossible, the body will be incor-

^a Rev. vii. 16.

^b 2 Cor. v. 4.

^c Rev. xxi. 25; Rev. xxii. 5.

^d Rev. xxi. 4.

ruptible and immortal;* it will never die; there will be no more death.^b

These words are, indeed, but few, and yet they are enough to bar out all the physical suffering to which man in this world is subject. Want, excessive toil, the scorching sun, the withering cold, the anguish of pain, the sufferings of death, do not these few words express the great catalogue of human miseries, so far as they are to be felt in the flesh? How blessed, therefore, to know that they can never enter within the gates of the city for which the Spirit of God is preparing a people, and to which He is guiding them with a sure and loving hand. Even they who know by happy experience how greatly the grace of God can bear up the afflicted in their trials, yet must feel that it will be a further exercise of goodness and loving kindness, when the trials themselves are shut out from approaching them or their fellow citizens, for ever and for ever.

* 1 Cor. xv. 54.

^b Rev. xxi. 4.

CHAPTER VI.

The Renewed Spirit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RENEWED SPIRIT.

EVEN a greater manifestation of God's goodness to His people than will be enjoyed through the redemption of the body will be found in the provision which He has made for their complete unmixed and exalted happiness of mind.

The cares of this life,—What pages of each man's past history do these words characterise ! Unite the affections and the understanding together in your thoughts, and how is the latter cramped and defeated in its struggles ! the former, how often wounded, how often misplaced !

1. In the present life, there are very different measures of intellectual capacity distributed amongst men. Some are by com-

parison intensely acute; some are filled with stores of acquired knowledge; others are ignorant and dull. But if, instead of judging of men by weighing them one against another, we take a more positive estimate of them, the necessary conclusion is, that at present we know but little, that we easily lose the knowledge we have gained, that the powers of the mind decay after a season, that all its operations are liable to be retarded by imperfection, and that those who most need to employ the intellectual faculties are constantly meeting with insuperable obstructions to their progress. There is something in the very organisation of man which presses down his mind, when it is seeking to soar upwards. There are also limits beyond which it passes into a region of uncertainty and shadows; and the conclusions tenaciously held at any time as the result of processes of thought, are always liable to be hastily abandoned under the influence of other processes, arising from a different starting point, or travelling along a separate channel. They who know the most are con-

scious that their knowledge is circumscribed. They who think the most learn to distrust their powers.

A new condition of the intellect in the future state is made an object of hope for the redeemed, by the Word of God. *For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . . Now we see through a glass, darkly* (in a metallic mirror, which reflects imperfectly), *but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.** What an astonishing expansion of the powers of the intellect, and of the capacity for receiving knowledge! The knowledge of the people of God in that day is declared to be perfect, and to be like His knowledge of them. This opens a prospect of the exercise of those powers upon all the mighty and perfect works of God's creation, and upon the operations of His all-pervading providence. Most expressly it declares, that instead of the faint perception

* 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 12.

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of Himself, which is all to which their faculties can reach at present, they shall be admitted to a perfect knowledge of Him. Here appears to be an inexhaustible source of the purest pleasure. Moreover, the prayer of Christ for His disciples unites acquaintance with Himself to acquaintance with His Father, as a privilege and blessing of that day. *Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.**

II. The mind will be relieved, in that happy and final state, from other evils, now its portion, besides that of being cramped and clogged in its range by man's present physical organisation. Care and anxiety will find no entrance there. We may go to-day from house to house without finding one single person whose condition is that of perfect rest. But in that blessed city the enquirer would go from street to street, from mansion to mansion, and traverse its length and breadth from gate to gate, without hearing of one

* John xvii. 24.

aching heart. It is not only in the grave, but blessedly and consciously in the eternal world, that the weary will be at rest. *To you who are troubled*, saith St. Paul, *there will be rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.*^a That prospect of rest is, doubtless, more blessed to some than to others, for it is undeniable that anxiety is by no means equally distributed. But even those of Christ's disciples who, to the eyes of others, pass the most placid lives, would testify that there is great sweetness to their souls in the promise of rest and peace for them in the life to come.

There are other expressions in the Holy Scriptures which tell the same happy tale, and on which it is right to look in this place. Every word which follows is radiant with the love of God; *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. . . . for the former things are passed away.*^b

III. If the blessedness of that state is in

^a 2 Thess. i. 7.

^b Rev. xxi. 4.

great part revealed by means of declarations that it will be exempt from our present human sources and evidences of trouble, it is not so altogether. To the apprehension of some it might seem that no tears, no cares, and boundless knowledge, might be compatible with a dull and uninteresting life. Against this objection, we must set in the forefront the fact of God's presence and His blessing, as a sufficient security for the happiness of the saints being complete. But it has pleased Him also to speak positively on the subject.

Here in this world there is no satisfaction which has not its alloy,—no cup of refreshing water into which a drop of bitterness has not fallen, or may not fall. God gives us great blessings, undeserved, and only not fruitful of intense gratitude because we fail to own His hand and to number His mercies. But one reason why we are less quick in discerning His goodness is, that in our earthly lot there is always something, great or small, to produce a measure of discontent, except where the heart has been singularly disciplined

by the grace of God. But the Holy Scriptures speak of that state as one of positive enjoyment, of lively pleasure, of conscious blessedness. *I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.^a In Thy presence is fulness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.^b* They who now undergo a fiery trial are thus exhorted and encouraged,—*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.^c* Stronger language could not be found whereby to express happiness full to overflowing.

iv. A complete deliverance from sin, and from every taint of inward corruption, and, in the place of all inward evil, the most perfect holiness of mind and heart, will be part of the happiness of the final state of the saints. Here they long to be holy, strive against sin, and pray for God's grace; but they feel the working of sin within them, and have too much cause to mourn that they live so little

^a Ps. xvii. 15.

^c 1 Peter iv. 13.

^b Ps. xvi. 11.

in the Divine presence, and are so unworthy to look up. They know what is the law in the members waging war against the law of the enlightened mind. How bitter often their disappointment, how strong their grief, that they seem still to grovel in the dust, when they are invited to hold communion with God, and have the promise that He will abide with them! But in the day of their redemption Christ will present them before His Father *holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable, even in His sight.** And after that, not even the temptation to sin can assail them, their deliverance from that danger will be complete, and for ever. His name will be on their foreheads, never to be erased, and they will go no more out, and there can be no more curse, and the tempter will have been shut up in his own place, and be unable to approach them.

v. The disciples of Christ are bidden to let the same mind be in them which was also in Him. When they think of this as a proper

* Col. i. 22.

feature of their character, they are humbled to the dust by thinking how deplorably unlike they are to Him in whose image they ought to be renewed; and they are liable to be disturbed by the anxious question rising in their minds, "Can we be His when in heart and mind we so little resemble Him?" But in that state a Divine power will have wrought a complete conformity of their spirit to His. The will, the affections, by the transforming touch of the Divine Spirit, will have parted with every thing that is not after His pattern, and will have received whatever was wanting to effect a perfect resemblance between them and their Lord.

VI. And they will be conscious of His presence. This idea runs all through those visions of St. John to which so much reference has already been made. The saints are represented as knowing that they are with God and the Lamb. But they are not oppressed by the glory, and the greatness, and the majesty of the Almighty. The Divine presence is spoken of as a privilege, and as if it would

be a source of holy and exalted delight to them. *The glory of God and of the Lamb shall be in the city, and His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.**

What an exceeding as well as eternal weight of blessedness and of glory have we now surveyed! The intellect unclouded; the capacity for knowledge immeasurable; the subjects for its exercise, the whole creation, and all God's works of providence and grace; care and every form and source of sorrow and tears shut out; sinfulness at an end, and spotless holiness abiding for ever in the heart; an inward renewal in a complete likeness to Christ; and a capacity for finding ever-fresh delight in a consciousness of the Lord's presence! Surely to be exalted into such a state is to enter into the joy of their Lord! What can be imagined that would add to the sources or greatness of their happiness?

One purpose for which these things are re-

* Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

vealed to man must be to teach us what is to be done in order to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. We see in them what manner of persons we must seek to be, using all diligence, and watching unto prayer. The first steps are to be taken here, towards our participating in the blessed and final regeneration. God's people are here on earth to be a holy people, renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created them. They are to walk as Christ walked, manifesting the same spirit. It is to be their daily endeavour to be brought in heart and mind into closer and firmer union with Him. This is to be their study, this their prayer.

CHAPTER VII.

No Change, no Dishonour,
no Evil Communications.

CHAPTER VII.

NO CHANGE, NO DISHONOUR, NO EVIL
COMMUNICATIONS.

IMAGINATION might indulge itself in many a flight, if we granted it liberty to range at pleasure through the eternal world. But the result might be all fiction and not reality. For the contents of these chapters, therefore, we have desired to look to God's written Word as the only authority on which reliance can be placed. Such liberty as we have taken is that of following out some of its sacred suggestions into what have appeared to be their legitimate consequences. What remains to be noticed, as communicated by those sure records, may be said to concern the estate or condition of the saints. The

former word has its use in the Holy Scriptures, in the Prayer-Book, and in our olden literature, to represent that which attaches to us, but is external to us, which may affect the mind or body, but is not a quality or property of either.

The things now to be mentioned will hereafter stand in remarkable contrast with the present portion of Christian people, and will raise their future state to an elevation far above anything that they at present know.

1. Here everything is uncertain, and changeable; and nothing endures for any considerable length of time. We all do fade as a leaf. We never continue in one stay. What is your life? It is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Riches take wings and fly away. Pleasures are as unstable as the flowers which wither in a day. Many of the most coveted of earthly enjoyments carry within themselves the very sting which is presently to wound those who have indulged in them. We cannot put our hands upon any one thing

which we call our own and say how long it will remain in our possession.

This condition of human life is not to follow us it into the future world, but is to be altogether reversed. The crown of righteousness will be imperishable, and such as fadeth not away. That state is continually described as being life eternal. The pleasures there to be enjoyed will be for evermore. They who have their abode in the city which God has prepared for His people will go out of it no more for ever. The completed work of Christ is everlasting salvation, eternal redemption, and they whom it places in His hand shall never perish, shall never be plucked from Him.

II. Here the portion of the believer may be one of reproach. He may have to endure hardships for Christ's sake. He may be reputed a pretender, may be charged with unsociableness, and may have the ways of his life construed into a proud elevation of himself above the world which surrounds him; his motives may be misconstrued; and he may be made to feel that the world hates him, or

despises him, or has no sympathy with him, and yet that it is willing to smile upon him if he will return to it, and be like itself.

In that day, and for ever, the judgment of the world will be reversed. Christ does not say that the last *may be* first, and the first last; but that the last *shall* be first, and the first last; a very striking condemnation of the decisions which now meet with general concurrence. Yet the Lord did not mean that the rule then to be followed will be based upon the judgment of this world, and be simply a selection of that which is opposite to it. He rather teaches that the decisions then made will be grounded on totally different principles; and that thus what is highly esteemed among men may be treated as abominable in the sight of God. But thus it will come to pass, that the head which was only held in contempt in this life by the children of the world, may be decked with a crown of glory, placed upon it by the hand of God. The Lazarus, who lay at the rich man's gate hungry and neglected, may sit in the

highest room at God's feast. He whose trial has been mockery, and scorn, and the name of a hypocrite, whose rules of life have been partly misunderstood, but more misconstrued, will be clothed with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, because he belonged to Christ.

But it will not only be by means of the foil of present disesteem that the honour put upon the saints will shine forth with astonishing brightness. In their own sight, at present, they are far from being high in honour. They have some knowledge of their own hearts, and they have learned that they have nothing in themselves whereof to glory. They would despair of future blessedness if it depended on their own worthiness, and did not flow from Divine mercy, through the love and merits of a crucified Saviour. They are painfully conscious of the fact that in them the Divine image is distorted and debased, that they have broken the Divine law, and that they have not valued as they ought their inestimable privileges as believers in the Son

of God. How much fainter is their love of Christ than Christ's great love for them deserves! How fluctuating are their desires for those visitations of God's Holy Spirit which they are conscious that their souls need, and which God's precious promises entitle His people to expect, and assuredly call upon them to seek in prayer! When they think of this, what they feel that they merit at God's hand is not honour, but dishonour.

It may even be said, that they now have dishonour, as well as honour, in the estimation of God Himself. Truly, He does wonderfully exalt the weakest and least worthy of His servants. Instead of casting them off because of their provocations, He watches over them, cares for them, bears with them. He is not repulsed and offended by their weaknesses and inconsistencies, so as to forsake them. He does not withdraw from them the promise of His presence, though they show themselves so unworthy of His abiding with them. And yet there must be much in them which He cannot honour, when even

they themselves see reason for entreating Him with anxiety, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me!" and when they are questioning whether they really have part or lot with Him, as thus,—“Can it be that I am indeed a child of God, that I am an heir of eternal life, that these great promises are mine, that I shall be admitted into a holy dwelling-place, and to the presence of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; that I shall see God?”

But in that world, the disesteem in which they are held amongst men will have ceased; and God's work will have been perfected in them, so that there will be nothing to intercept from them the fullest radiance of His honour.

As for their estimate of themselves, they will indeed cast their crowns to the ground, and disclaim all right to glory in their salvation. They will ascribe it only to the Lamb, who redeemed them with His blood. But all sense of humiliation will have passed away, together with the unworthiness of which now it is the fruit.

Of the exaltation of the saints in that day, of the honour to which they will be raised, the powers of language appear to be exhausted when it attempts to convey such ideas as we now are capable of receiving. There is a crown of righteousness; a crown of glory that fadeth not away, to be given to all them who love Christ's appearing. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever.** Lazarus is taken to Abraham's bosom.^b Gentiles, from all parts of the earth, shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.^c The redeemed have offices to fulfil in that kingdom, which are significant of high distinction, even though we may fail to ascertain precisely what their functions will be. They are to be kings and priests unto God. They are to be guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb.^d Above all, they will be with Christ, not for an hour, but for ever. Here on earth

^a Dan. xii. 3.

^b Luke xvi. 30.

^c Matt. viii. 11.

^d Rev. v. 10; xix. 9.

His presence is promised to them as a great blessing, and, if promised, then also it is vouchsafed. He comes to His servants and abides with them, or He would not have assured them that He will show them such favour. Even here they would have a more distinct conviction of His actually dwelling with them, if they prized the promise of His presence more highly, and looked to it with more faith as a source of comfort. But it is to be remembered, that His promised presence here is an invisible presence; in fact, such as is only to be discerned by faith, though it can be relied upon, because it is promised, and may be discovered by its traces in the fruit which it produces.

Far better will it be in the final abode of righteousness. The Lamb of God will be seen and known, as the master of the feast, the glory of the temple, the light of the city. In His presence they will always dwell; such honour have all His saints.

Think of the contrast between the Christian prisoner in the dungeon of his persecutors,

or the Christian dependent on the parish, with his scanty allowance and his cheerless abode, and the state of those same persons when dwelling with their Lord. Even think of the most favoured of human kind, in respect of this world's good things, and their state of blessedness when Christ's glory shall be fully revealed. How strong the contrast between the apostles in their lowliness and weakness, when their Lord departed from amongst them,—or under the persecutions which they endured when they were preaching Jesus Christ and the resurrection,—or in the death of shame and suffering to which some of them were condemned,—and the lot of those same apostles, and of the saints with them, receiving the full answer which the Father will give to the prayer of His Son for them, —*Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.*^a That glory will not only be seen by them;—it will compass them about. There will be a brightness

^a John xvii. 24.

and a beauty around them, in comparison with which this world is at best mere darkness and imperfection. In the visions of the last two chapters of the Revelation the city is seen descending as an adorned bride, and the imagination strains itself in vain to picture the splendour which those grand and vivid descriptions are intended to draw out before the mind. But in the midst of them, there are a few expressions which appear to be comprehensive of the whole,—*He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.**

III. Another point in God's revelation of His purposes with regard to the future state of His people may bring our survey to a close. In that blessed city no evil words will ever be heard, and no evil example will ever allure the saints into a forbidden path. The tares will have no place with the wheat. There will be no net to draw in all manner of fishes. There will be nothing to pollute that city.

This exclusion of the wicked is not to be

* Rev. xxi. 7.

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regarded in a spirit of exultation over their misery and desolation. Here on earth it becomes those whose hearts the Lord has opened, to feel compassion, after their Lord's example, for all who are out of the way; to shed tears over an impenitent Jerusalem; and even when words most odious reach their ears, to desire only that the lips which spoke them may be cleansed from such pollution, the heart which conceived them converted, and the imperilled soul preserved from sinking into everlasting destruction. Even in their final rest, when the saints rejoice that the wicked have ceased from troubling, it will not be a rejoicing over their fall, and ruin, and misery. But it is plain that the glory of the eternal city would be dimmed, and its purity sullied, if it were to be a place in which the bad were to be intermingled with the good, as they necessarily are in this life. And we are taught, that in fact from all such intrusion the holy city will be protected. Before the gates are opened for the reception of the followers of the Lamb, the angels of God are to gather out of His

kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. Whosoever has not on a wedding garment will be thrust out. Even the slumbering virgins will knock in vain at the closed doors. The goats will be parted from the sheep for ever. The doers of the works of the flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God.^a But nothing is more decisive, nothing more awful, than the words which stand in the midst of the description of the new Jerusalem,—*And there shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*^b

We have been meditating on great things in this chapter. Let the reader pause and consider if his feet be on the sure way to the blessedness to which his thoughts have been directed. If not, let him at once seek the path in real earnest. The beginning of the

^a Matt. xiii. 41; xxii. 13; xxv. 12, 46; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^b Rev. xxi. 27.

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way is repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

If his foot be rightly directed now, let him hold that fast which he hath, that no man take his crown.

CHAPTER VIII.

Recapitulation.

CHAPTER VIII.

RECAPITULATION.

THE revelation which God has been pleased to make, with more or less distinctness, concerning the condition, occupations, and society of the redeemed in their final habitations, has now been considered and weighed with regard to its several principal disclosures. Finding nothing more to be added on that part of the subject, we may do well, before proceeding further, to gather together the conclusions to which we seem to have been led.

We began, after an introductory chapter (i.) to look (ii.) upon the future final state as having, for one of its features, active employ-

ment in the fulfilment of God's holy will and pleasure, the glorified saints finding happiness in His service in such offices and duties as He may see it good to commit to them. We foresaw, in such ministries, a vast and inexhaustible source of ever-varying interest for the saints, by reason of the extent and diversity of God's creative and providential operations throughout the universe.

Next (III.), we gave attention to the glorious and elevating views of the worship which is to be sustained without cessation in the holy city, noticing the remarkable distinctness with which Christ is then to be magnified as the Lamb that had been slain, being reverentially extolled as the Author of all the felicity which they who are singing His praises are entitled for ever to enjoy. Their song, renewed evermore without weariness, and poured forth out of hearts brim-full of gratitude and love, will be such as this,—*Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.* . . . Worthy*

* Rev. vii. 10.

*is the Lamb that was slain Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.**

Having thus recognised earnest reverential and loving worship, and active service in fulfilment of the Divine purposes, as constituting the two greatest elements of that blessedness, we yet further discerned (iv.) in God's holy Word, another source of true and even intense happiness, in the fellowship or communion of the saints, who are described in various ways which imply the existence of common interests, and the enjoyment of a harmonious society. We examined the grounds on which it might be believed that they will know one another, and find delight in being associated together, not only former friends with friends, but also the children of God, whose lot on earth was cast in ages far apart from each other, meeting and delighting in their common privileges, and rejoicing in intercourse which nothing can ever interrupt. Above all other fellowship will stand, as we have seen, the happiness of the saved in being

* Rev. v. 12 and 9.

for ever with Him who redeemed them. They will be admitted into holy and blessed intercourse with Him, having been so prepared for it by His own grace and loving kindness as to find in it more delight than any other fellowship will be capable of affording.

Thankful to be permitted to travel, in that otherwise unknown region of contemplation, under the guidance of Holy Scripture, and at the same time anxious not to stray out of its paths, either to the right or left, in pursuit of the uncertain phantoms of human imagination, we next gathered together the intimations, dropped here and there on the pages of inspiration, concerning the personal condition of the redeemed, in that unspeakable glory. We found that such communications as are made to man's faith on that subject consist chiefly of general declarations; and that when any details are given, they are conveyed, for the most part, and perhaps necessarily, (considering the present limited capacity of the human mind,) in the form of assurances of exemption from the evils and disabilities which

are attendant upon man's state in this present world. Such limited communications fall short of what we might desire to receive ; but we must be content, and thankful. We must own that God's wisdom infinitely surpasses our own ; and that His goodness has ruled all His dealings with us ; and for more knowledge on this as well as other points we must wait till our time of imperfectness has run its appointed course. Proceeding to ascertain what He has seen fit to disclose, we saw that both in body and in mind the saints will be placed beyond the reach of every evil. There will be nothing in their mental or bodily constitution or circumstances which for one instant could mar their felicity.

The body (v.) is represented as not consisting of flesh and blood ; as spiritual, yet at the same time a substantial material organization. This is beyond our comprehension ; but we must be satisfied with so much as we can conceive of it, and leave the rest until the day shall dawn in which it is to be realised. That body is described as one that

will bear a near relation to the body with which we now are clothed,—such a relation as subsists between the seed of a plant and the growth which rises out of it. It will have undergone a marvellous change, which will bring it into a resemblance to Christ's glorified body. It will not be subject to waste, or decay, or weariness; it will need neither sustenance nor sleep; it will know nothing of pain; and it will never die.

As for the soul, or spiritual part, we saw (vi.) why we may believe that the intellectual power and capacity of the saints will be marvellously increased, and liberated from the incumbrances which now restrain and cramp them. Vast and new fields of knowledge will be opened. The affections also will never again be exposed to any misdirection,—tempters, temptation, and sinfulness of nature, having no more place in them. Every source of care, tears, and sorrow, will be dried up for ever. To sum up all, and to comprise more than has now been expressed, there will be a close re-

semblance between the hearts and minds as well as the fashion of the bodies of the glorified saints, and Christ Himself, the giver to them of all that blessed inheritance.

There remained yet further for consideration (vii.), the security and durability of the promised blessedness, so strikingly in contrast with the utter uncertainty and changeableness of everything here below, including life itself. There was also to be added the honour which will take the place of disesteem and contempt in this world, of self-reproach on account of sin, and of the displeasure of their Heavenly Father, which His children too frequently provoke by reason of their sins. To this was united the high privilege of entire exemption from all evil influences and communications.

St. Paul testifies that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.** This he says, having in contemplation the joy and peace in

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

believing, the gift of inward strength, and other blessings, temporal probably as well as spiritual, which it pleases God to bestow even in this life, upon those in whom the love of His name abides with all its holy influences. But surely, while truly representing His goodness to those who in this world are a chosen generation and a peculiar people, it may be applied more fully, and more emphatically, to the preparation which He has' made for their happiness in the life everlasting. O that the recollection and survey of these lofty blessings of the redeemed may help many to set their affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God!

CHAPTER IX.

Where?

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CHAPTER IX.

WHERE?

WHAT will be the scene of all this blessedness? In what region of the immeasurable and inconceivable vastness which we call the universe, on what spot in God's mighty creation, will the saints, in their glorified state, find the prepared habitations which love divine has destined to be theirs for ever?

The question has its interest, at least for many thoughtful minds; and yet there is one consideration which deducts much from its real importance. It will be where God has fixed it, and where He will be with them; and God is love.

Still, there is nothing in God's Word which

has been written in vain ; and if it contains any intimations as to where those dwellings will be, it is our privilege and duty to consider them, and to accept what appears to be their teaching, with readiness and thankfulness of mind. He doubtless had a wise and beneficent purpose in placing any helps to such knowledge within our reach. Perhaps He foresaw that we should be better able to realise what He has revealed respecting the future state, if He drew our thoughts to a particular dwelling-place as intended for those who shall partake of the glorious resurrection in the last day. He may have had other purposes in what He has seen it good to say, for He has not disclosed His reasons. But whatever His object may have been, He has not left the subject to be altogether buried in obscurity.

We have already seen enough to suggest that a substantial place, a place that may be touched and walked upon, not a mere region in the air, will be required for the residence of such as it is revealed that the redeemed

are to be, in their bodily frame. Every description of the scene of their habitation tends to confirm such an anticipation. It is a city, with walls, and gates, and streets, having a river flowing through it, with trees on either side. Or it is paradise, that is, a garden. Or it is a chamber, furnished for a feast. These descriptions are more or less figurative, but the idea of a resting-place for the sole of the foot appears to underlie them all.

There are two portions of Holy Scripture from which many rays of clear light are thrown upon this subject.

One of them consists of the two concluding chapters of the Revelation. The 21st chapter begins with St. John's declaration, that in his vision he saw a new heaven and a new earth, and that on the new earth there was no more sea. Down to this new earth he saw the holy city descending out of heaven from God. It had first been prepared above; then it came to be planted upon the new earth. On the new earth it alighted and stood, and there is no subsequent intimation of its ever being trans-

ported to any other region. All the particulars of its construction, magnificence, and use, are set forth as if there were no thought of its ever being removed into any fresh scene.

The other Scripture is 2 Peter iii. In it we find no mention of a city; but more is said, than in the other passage, concerning the new earth, to which St. John's vision brings down the new Jerusalem from heaven, where it had been prepared.

St. Peter begins with the past time, distant by many a generation, in which the earth was without form and void. What may have been its earlier condition is passed over in silence. But it is not irrelevant here to notice that the rocks themselves contain evidences innumerable of God's creative power, and of the diversity of His wisdom in contriving and constructing the works of His hands. They display the traces of His active operations through an immeasurable series of past ages. They also exhibit the marks of mighty convulsions, revolutions, and transitions, and distinct indications of the introduc-

tion, at many and distant intervals, of a new order of things. The facts, whose impress is stamped so legibly in the structure of the earth, impart a grandeur to those words of the Lord Jesus,—*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* He who spake them appears to declare that our finite minds cannot travel far enough back into the past to fix upon a time when God's working began, as well as that it has gone on since without any cessation. But in course of ages, and far down in this earth's history, came the latest of those great catastrophes which appear to have terminated one condition of the world, and to have opened the way for another. It is with that crisis that St. Peter commences.

In the latest revolution the earth had been overflowed with water. It was next to be prepared for the reception of new inhabitants. To this end, by the word of the Lord, the earth stood out of the water; and God made man, and clothed the earth, and peopled it with the race which now, for a season, has possession of it. From the mighty work of

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the past, the apostle proceeds to another change, which still awaits the earth, and which is to be effected by fire. *The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word, the word of the Lord, are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men.*^a Then, as the tenth verse further declares, *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up.* But this is only the preparation for something better. *We, according to His promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein (in both of which) dwelleth righteousness.*^b

The promise here referred to is contained in Isaiah lxv. 17 and lxvi. 20. It is repeated in Rev. xxi. 1. The dwelling of righteousness on the new earth can scarcely signify anything else but the habitation thereon of the saints, in their glorified state, cleansed from all sin, and made righteous altogether.

And will not that new earth be this old

^a 2 Peter iii. 7

^b 2 Peter iii. 13.

earth renewed? St. Peter, indeed, says also that this world will be *burned up*. And St. John saw in his vision that the first earth had *passed away*. But this passing away may signify no more than another transition or metamorphosis. And St. Peter himself helps us to the conclusion that the earth may melt and be dissolved without thereupon ceasing to exist. The world of which he speaks as having *perished* by water, was not annihilated. It still remained to be reconstructed, and prepared for the habitation of man. In like manner may it *perish* by fire in days yet to come. It may have its surface and everything upon it burned up, its substance melted with fervent heat, but the process may be a preparation for its coming forth in fresh beauty as the new earth, the blessed dwelling-place of the saints. This planet, instead of being blotted out of the heavens, leaving behind it no trace of its existence, may still abide in its orbit, its face renewed with surpassing beauty, glorious to Him whose hand shall have adorned it. Ceasing to be an abode

of sin, relieved of the curse under which now it suffers, it may become a new illustration of the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God; and that it will be so, is the just and natural inference from the teaching of these two apostles.

It may be proper here to add an explanatory word respecting what is said in Holy Scripture on the subject of heaven, in connection with the blessings provided for the Lord's redeemed people. There appears to be nothing to require us to understand such expressions in a sense which would set them at issue with this glorious destiny of the renewed earth. True, the inheritance of the saints is reserved for them in heaven. They are exhorted to have their treasures in heaven. They have an house not made with hands, eternal (an eternal house) in the heavens. So likewise the city in which they are to dwell is in the heavens at present; there the eternal city is in course of preparation. But in God's time, future to us, at the end of the world, the vision of St. John represents

its *coming down from God out of heaven*,^a to be planted on the new earth as its settled place of rest.

Moreover, this expectation is in remarkable harmony with the light which the sacred writers throw on our Lord's second advent. He will *come* again, and it will be to this world. He shall *come* in the clouds of heaven. St. Peter, some of whose words have already had our special attention, employed a remarkable expression, bearing on this point, when the afflicted cripple had been healed by Divine power, through his word, at the beautiful gate of the temple. He said that the heavens must receive Jesus Christ, who had ascended thither, *until the times of restitution of all things*.^b Nor does the Scripture anywhere represent that after the Lord's second coming to this world He will ever depart from it again, nor that He will bear away His saints to some other abode. Rather it teaches that having come He will remain with them, and that their city, the new Jerusalem, which has descended from heaven

^a Rev. xxi. 2. 10.

^b Acts iii. 21.

to the new earth, will also be made the habitation of His glory. All seems to be consistent and harmonious, wonderfully interesting and beautiful. This earth, in the beginning God's handywork, appears to have undergone many mighty revolutions. The last of them preceded the creation of man, who soon fell from his innocence, and is, by the state of his inmost heart, and likewise by transgression of the Divine law, a sinner. The next great convulsion, (how near, who can measure?) will prepare it to be the blessed abode of the redeemed, who will be all righteous; and the earth shall be delivered from the curse which was once pronounced upon it because of man's transgression. It shall receive from heaven the promised city, of which, and of its inhabitants, such glorious things are spoken, and in which shall be established the throne of God and of the Lamb. This would be the state of perfectness for which the whole of the present creation is described as groaning together, and travailing in pain.

To realise this prospect, is to bring the soul under a strong impulse to live for such an eternity. There may still be far more hidden than is as yet revealed ; but enough is seen to quicken the believer to long for the day, as well as to prepare for it. St. Peter saw the power of this expectation as a motive to earnestness in applying holy discipline to the heart. He had finished his forewarning to his brethren, that the elements of this world would be dissolved by fervent heat, and had told them of the new heavens and the new earth wherein righteousness should dwell. He then turned the solemn truth to account by the exhortation,—*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.* He did not thus speak to them simply as to persons who knew that such things would come to pass, but as to those who were watching for them with a heart ready to welcome the event, and longing for its arrival.

Do we look for such things, believing that the day when it comes will be to us a day of

blessedness secured to us by the promises of a faithful covenant-keeping God ? Then let us be diligent, that Christ may find us prepared for that day ; *in peace*, by being in Him who then is to be the giver of peace to His people ; *without spot*, being cleansed, through faith in His finished work, by His most precious blood ; and *blameless* as being acknowledged to have lived in the Spirit, and to have walked in the Spirit, renewed in mind, and made pure in heart, and all by the grace of God.

CHAPTER X.

When?

CHAPTER X.

WHEN?

WE have meditated upon the goodness which God has in store for His people, and have seen how much is promised and described to satisfy the thoughtful mind, and to awaken in it a longing and a love for Christ's appearing. The questions almost naturally follow,—“When will this happy day arrive? Is it far off, or may it possibly be near? Are there any signs foretold as giving notice of its approach, or any conditions laid down which must first be fulfilled, and by which we may possibly be taught that at least the blessed time is not yet to be expected?”

The subject to which we are thus brought, is one on which much has been written, often with a becoming hesitation and modesty; but

on the other hand too frequently in a dogmatic and positive spirit, and with a lamentable intolerance of contrary opinions, or of any unreadiness to receive its decisions. Let us try to entertain this great question in a calm, cautious, and reverential frame of mind.

All that will be here attempted is to point to a few great scriptural landmarks. With regard to the details (which some as confidently interpret in one sense as others do in another,) it is possible that the time has not yet come for the certain understanding of many of them.

“When shall these things be?” The Lord’s own teaching when He was on earth, appears to bring together, as belonging to one great crisis, the following momentous events:—His own second coming, the resurrection of all the dead, the universal judgment, the admission of the saints into eternal blessedness, and the consignment of the ungodly to their endless tribulation.

Now all these events may be comprised within a very narrow compass of time; a few hours would suffice for them.

The Coming of the Lord Jesus is to be sudden, and may require no more time than His ascension, to which it is to bear a resemblance, being a coming in the clouds of heaven, as at His departure a cloud received Him out of His disciples' sight.^a

The General Resurrection is also so described as that it might be an instantaneous miracle.^b

The Judgment is not represented as if it were to be preceded by any investigation of the nature of a trial. Each living man, having risen from the dust of earth, will be placed at once, either at the right hand or at the left hand of the great white throne.^c

The Sentence, so far as we have any knowledge respecting it, will be expressed in a very few emphatic words.^d

When those words have been spoken, nothing will remain to be fulfilled with respect to the saints, but either their translation to everlasting habitations, in some other region of the universe, if such be indeed the

^a Acts i. 11.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 52.

^c Matt. xxv. 33.

^d Matt. xxv. 34. 41.

provision which God has made for them ; or their preservation for a little while in their Lord's loving care, while the world undergoes its purification by fire, and is prepared to be the scene of the full happiness of His people.

Thus the interval between Christ's sudden appearing, and the saints' entrance into their everlasting habitations, may be of very short continuance.

Let us consider some examples which may show that such as has now been suggested was the purport of our blessed Lord's teaching.

The tares and the wheat grow together until the harvest. Then at once the husbandman orders his servants to bind the tares together, and to burn them, but to gather the wheat into his barn.*

The kingdom of heaven is likened to a net cast into the sea. When the hours of the fishing are over, the net is at once drawn ashore, and the fishes separated and disposed of. So shall it be in the end of the world ; the angels shall come forth, and sever the

* Matt. xiii. 24—30

wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing, and gnashing of teeth.^a

Again, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a man who has sown his field with grain, and when the corn is ripe immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.^b

The virgins in the parable await the coming of the bridegroom. He comes unexpectedly. The wise go in. The door is shut. The foolish cannot enter, for they went to buy oil, and have returned too late.^c

The man who had entrusted the talents to his servants came back without notice, reckoned with them at once, and promptly adjudged to them their proper recompense.

To the same effect is our Lord's remarkable discourse, spoken on the mount of Olives, partly parable, partly plain unfigurative teaching, in which He described the Son of Man as coming in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, having all nations before

^a Matt. xiii. 47—50.

^c Matt. xxv. 1—13.

^b Mark iv. 26—34.

Him, separating them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, instantly driving away the goats for ever from His presence, and calling the sheep to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.*

That which is described in these parables would scarcely require many hours for its accomplishment. The beginning and the ending are brought close together. It may almost happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, by the exercise of Divine power.

It is to the interval between the present time and that great crisis that the present question relates. How long will the tares and wheat grow together? How long will the net be spread out in the lake? When will the corn be ripe? How soon is the bridegroom to come? Is the reckoning for the talents near, or far off? The sheep and the goats are now together; when will their separation take place?

The precise time appears to be designedly

* Matt. xxv. 31—46.

hidden from the research of man. Of that day and hour no man knew while Christ was yet on earth.^a The reason which He gave to His disciples for always watching may still exist,—*Ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.*^b The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night, when men have been encouraging themselves with confident expectations of peace and safety.^c It is so uncertain that it is never wise to be unwatchful and unprepared. The apostles were not to know the times and the seasons; the Father kept that knowledge in His own power.^d But afterwards, some further light was thrown upon their minds, by which we may profit. And yet still, the information given is evidently so limited as to preclude our measuring the days with precision, though it is plain enough to stimulate us to watch and to pray, and to prepare for the day of God, and the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.^e When that great and solemn crisis

^a Matt. xxiv. 36; ^b Matt. xxv. 13. ^c 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

^d Acts i. 7

^e Titus. ii. 13.

comes, it will take those who are then living by surprise, as do many of the events which happen in this life. We have, perhaps, long expected them. Of their ultimate arrival we have entertained no doubt. But for their actual advent we were not prepared. So then, if the final crisis happen in the hours of darkness, the night may have set in like any other night. Or, if Christ's glorious appearing occur in the day-time, as did His ascension, the rising sun will have been clothed with no visible manifestations to warn the awakening nations that the day of judgment has arrived.

Yet still the Christian is to watch, and to discern the signs of the times ; and some signs there are for which it is our duty specially to look.

1. One, of which Christ Himself speaks, is the preaching of the gospel to all nations. He declares that when that shall have been accomplished, the end will come. He does not say that the gospel shall have triumphed over all opposition to such a degree as that all mankind shall be truly converted to God ;

but that all the kingdoms of the world shall have had their day of visitation. The gospel shall have been preached to them.

Plain and clear as is this declaration itself, we are quite unable to measure the extent to which it has already been fulfilled. We know that there are nations now in darkness on which the light shone in former days. Asia Minor presents an instance of privileges being forfeited and lost which once were received and enjoyed. We have no means of tracing the extent to which many other regions now overspread by the clouds of heathen ignorance had the gospel preached to them by the apostles, or apostolic men. The testimony of St. Mark and that of St. Paul go far beyond what the sacred history exemplifies, whether we read it in the Acts or the Epistles. The evangelist declares that the apostles *went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*^a St. Paul does but repeat the same testimony; *their sound went forth into all the*

^a Mark xvi. 20.

*earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.** This must certainly be construed with some qualification, else ere now the end would have come. But to say the least, it suggests that many of the countries which are now heathen were long since, even in the first days of the gospel, visited by those who preached its glad tidings.

But assuming that some of the present heathen nations have received and forsaken the gospel, and hence that, so far as this prediction is concerned, the end may possibly be nearer than at first sight it appears, there remains another consideration which still further shortens the probable interval, and brings the day of glory nearer than some may suppose.

A great work is already in hand. The leaven of Christ's truth has been placed in some great masses of the heathen population, and is beginning to heave. The whole lump may soon be leavened. It will not be by the power or persuasion of man, but by the Spirit of the

* Rom. x. 18.

living God; but whenever it shall please Him to put forth His ordinary influences in an extraordinary measure, the tidings of peace will flow like a mighty river through many lands, in which they now seem only to trickle onward like an insignificant stream. It is possible with God for a nation to be born in a day. Without a miracle, the hearts of a whole people may be opened in a moment for the reception of the truth. He who can enlighten one mind, and make one new creature in Christ Jesus, would not find it too hard for Him to show the same mercy to millions in a brief space of time. The day of Pentecost may yet have many a counterpart throughout the world, by means of the inward operation of Divine grace on a scale infinitely grander, (though not accompanied by outward demonstrations,) than that which distinguished the great first effusion of the Spirit.

Be it remembered that it is on the publication of the gospel, not on its cordial reception or its saving efficacy, that "the end" is made to hang.

142 THE FUTURE LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS.

And now let the Lord's own words bring this section to a close.

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.**

And the gospel must first be published among all nations.^b

2. Another necessary precursor of the end, noted in the Scriptures of truth, is the conversion of the Jews.^c Zechariah foretold that God will pour out His Spirit upon them, and that they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced. In the New Testament, their future history is foreshadowed in Romans ix. x. xi., where the apostle teaches that their blindness shall one day be removed; that all Israel shall be saved; and that as their casting away was the reconciling of the Gentile world to God, so shall the receiving of them again be as life from the dead.^d But here, as well as in the case of the heathen, the large and special employment of a power which even now never

* Matt. xxiv. 14.

^b Mark xiii. 10.

^c Zech. xii. 10.

^d Rom. xi. 15.

slumbers, is all that is requisite to effect the turning of that whole scattered people to the Lord, who is willing to have mercy upon them.

3. Another preliminary necessity is the fulfilment of certain measurements of time, declared by the voice of prophecy. In all of these chronological reckonings there is a certain obscurity as to their starting point, which has perplexed many, and has led expositors to different endings. This indistinctness may have been designed to stimulate watchfulness, without gratifying research by certain success. But it is worthy of notice that there is a great amount of concurrence amongst many commentators on Daniel xii. 7, 11, 12, and Rev. xi. 3 and xii. 6, in bringing the scriptural measurements of time, given in those passages, to their end at about the present time, or soon after. That such an interpretation may possibly be correct, is enough to give emphasis to the forewarning that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

4. It would be wrong to evade the question

as to whether a new dispensation, differing from that of the gospel, and extending precisely over a thousand years, is to be interposed between a time still future to us and the judgment of the great day,—a judgment which has been already noticed as immediately following the second coming of Christ, and as ushering in for God's people a blessedness which is to be eternal.

Certain expositors of prophecy connect many of the predictions of the Old Testament with such a dispensation, and they apply in the same way some of the foreshowings of the New Testament. But the dispensation itself is not definitely foretold in the ancient Scriptures. The Lord Jesus also ended His ministry without having foreshadowed it. On the contrary, by His parables, in the way already shown, He connected together His Coming, His Resurrection, the Judgment, the punishment of the wicked, and the beginning of the saints' blessedness for ever, as belonging to one final and awful crisis, at the close of this dispensation, which He also treats as the last, that is to be

until the end come. The history of the Church in the Acts, and the Apostolic Epistles, follow each other without declaring that such a dispensation is to be expected. The visions of the book of Revelation ensue, and are nearly concluded when we reach the twentieth chapter. There we meet, for the first and only time, with the mention of a period of a thousand years. Do those few words then really announce an intermediate dispensation between this of the gospel and the final blessedness of the saints? Are they meant to tell us of risen saints, living on the earth in holiness and peace, while nations of ungodly men people the rest of the world, and at length go forth to battle against the camp of the saints, and the beloved city, and are only foiled by the descent upon them of fire from heaven? It at least appears to many that the vision in question does not demand a change of those expectations which the rest of the Holy Scriptures awaken. The binding of satan, say they, may be discerned in that most wonderful and astonishing work, (an amazement to us if we intently think of

it, even at this distance of time,) by which an end was put to his deception of the nations throughout the Roman empire, and far beyond, by an unmitigated idolatry. The fetters by which he held those nations in subjection to him were broken by the preaching of the gospel, and fixed upon himself. It does not necessarily follow that even then, and in all subsequent time, he has not been going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But the phenomenon by which the words of St. John are here supposed to have been fulfilled was perfectly marvellous. It was a pulling down of the strongholds of satan in Greece and Italy, in Spain and Gaul, in Germany, and even in Britain, in some parts of Africa, and of the East, by a power which, humanly speaking, was feeble in the extreme, even the breath of the gospel. It could only be mighty through God. But in His hands it wonderfully prevailed. And if this great and astonishing shutting up of satan,—that he should deceive the nations no more, as he had deceived them for long ages,—be what

was meant by his binding for a thousand years, and that note of time may be taken for a long stretch of years rather than for a period precisely defined, we may judge ourselves to be living towards its close, and bordering on the days, if not actually entering into them, in which satan is to be released from his prison for a short time, and again to deceive the nations.* Is there nothing in the present workings of the human mind to set us thinking whether these may not be the predicted days of his liberation ?

5. Furthermore, some Scriptures, and that which was last noticed is of their number, show that the full blessedness of the saints will not commence, nor the judgment be set, nor the Lord come, until there has been a great falling away, unbelief, heedless indifference, and the world be altogether as unprepared as it was in the days of Noah.

This consideration is peculiarly solemn ; and it calls upon Christ's people to watch and pray that in such perilous times, if they should see

* Rev. xx. 7, 8.

them, they may be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

6. National commotions and war against Christ, (which looks like war against His people, as well as His gospel,) appear also to be foretold as belonging to the time of the end, and as being the immediate occasion of the Lord's second coming.

There is much need to think and write with caution on the whole of this subject. It is easy to fall into the error of applying to one time what is spoken of another. The remarkable way in which the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world are interwoven together in our Lord's sublime discourses, (Matt. xxiv., Mark xiii., Luke xxi.,) so as to make it difficult, perhaps impossible, completely to disentangle them, reminds us of our liability to err in our interpretations. But here the Revelation appears to speak more distinctly, though it be in the form of visions. It represents Christ as coming to quell a warfare, and to subdue all that have been bold enough to fight against Him. Of this there is an

instance, when He appears on the white horse, leading the armies of heaven,^a just before the manifestation of the great white throne of judgment.^b

What has been written in this chapter may be less definite than some readers might desire. Let them, however, carefully consider whether in reality the Word of God warrants our coming to more positive conclusions. There is enough in the Divine forewarnings to keep us watching, not enough to place us in the seat of the prophets.

The great day, the time when the perfect and eternal blessedness is to begin, will arrive, when the gospel shall have been published throughout the world to all nations,—at a time when a change shall have been wrought in the Jewish mind which may be compared to life from the dead,—at a time when a certain span of years shall have been completed, of which the precise beginning has not hitherto been decidedly fixed by interpreters, but the end of which is made by most reckon-

^a Rev. xix. 11.

^b Rev. xx. 11.

ings to converge towards these our days, or a time soon to follow. Moreover, it will be when the enemies of Christ are daring and active, and when probably the kingdoms of this world are in a state of unsettledness and agitation.

It is no less than a duty, resting on all believers in the Lord Jesus, to watch the aspect of the times, to test them by the signs to which the Lord has pointed as characteristic of the last days, and likewise to observe the progress of such events or operations as are still wanting to the fulfilment of prophecy. Whatever seems to sound the note of preparation for the Lord's coming, in the ears of those who are listening for it, bids the believer to rejoice and lift up his head, because his redemption draweth nigh. It imparts freshness to the blessed proclamation,—*Surely I come quickly!* It throws desire and expectation into the answer,—*Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus!** It adds urgency to the words of Him who is to visit this earth, in His glorious Majesty,—*Let your loins be girded*

* Rev. xxii. 20.

*about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding; that when He cometh, they may open to Him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching.**

* Luke xii. 35 36.

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CHAPTER XI.

What Manner of Persons
ought ye to be?

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT MANNER OF PERSONS OUGHT YE TO BE?

WHEN St. Peter had described in awful terms the coming catastrophe of the world by fire, and was about to speak of the Christian's expectation of the new heavens and the new earth, wherein righteousness should dwell, he earnestly called attention to the power which such an expectation ought to exercise as a holy influence, affecting the believer's heart and life. These are his words,—*Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire, shall be*

dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ?^a

This was addressed to the true and faithful, for the whole epistle was written to those who had obtained *like precious faith*^b to that of the Apostle himself, *through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,*^c whom he regarded as *brethren*, and as *beloved*, and whom he could so describe on higher grounds than any that were either external, or simply intellectual; namely, that their union with Christ Himself was that of living branches in the true vine.

To these he suggests, with much urgency, that they should make a practical use of the solemn revelation of those coming events to the elucidation of which these pages have been dedicated. He applies it as a new motive for their seeking higher attainments, and stretching themselves up with a desire to reach a purer and holier standard.

The expressions employed are worthy of

^a 2 Peter i. 11, 12.

^c 2 Peter i. 10, and iii. 1, 14.

^b 2 Peter i. 1.

particular notice. An eminent commentator* justly observes, that the words rendered "holy conversation and godliness" are plural, and would be most accurately rendered "holy behaviours and pieties." Such words would have been too uncouth to have a place in our authorised version; but the explanation that such would have been the closest translation of them may serve to make their force and meaning somewhat clearer. Holiness is to leaven the character and the life of the Christian. It is to reign within the man, and to guide his whole conduct. He who already lives by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him, is assured of events which will usher in a new, a holy, and an eternal dispensation. While the prospect is freshly before him, he is bidden to consider with what intense earnestness and perseverance he ought to strive for progress towards a state which may be found to be in harmony with his hopes for the future.

Besides this, he is to be looking for the coming of the day of God. He is to occupy

* Dean Alford.

his mind with the blessedness which ~~is~~ to be revealed ; and he is so to realise its sources of happiness, as to have his longing for the enjoyment of them quickened and strengthened. Not content with vague and general notions, he is to meditate on God's revelation respecting the future lot of the redeemed, and the time of its commencement, in all the details which he can discover. He is to aid his appreciation of them, by noticing how much they are in contrast with his present experience upon earth. He is to educate his mind into a state in which his deliberate judgment may unite with the impulses of his affections in making this his fervent prayer,—
Even so come, Lord Jesus !

He is also to hasten unto the coming of that day, as if he would meet and welcome it, and shorten the interval which must elapse before its arrival. This he will do by sincere prayer that the kingdom may come, by helping forward the work which must be finished before the day can dawn, and by earnestly seeking those dews of grace upon his own soul

which may make him ripe for the glory which is to be then revealed.

St. Peter had yet more to urge than is contained in the verses already quoted. After again speaking of the *day of God* as to be distinguished by the melting of the solid structure of the earth, and by the fiery heat of its atmosphere, he reminded these beloved brethren in Christ that they were looking for new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness would dwell. On this expectation he grounded a strong call for thoughtful and earnest preparation,—*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

To be in the state thus recommended, they must have no misgivings as to the nature and efficacy of the work of Christ for their redemption. They must also have a blessed consciousness of the presence and quickening power of God the Holy Ghost. Sin is the destructive enemy of peace. There can be no peace in a sinner's breast until he may believe

that his sins are forgiven. Hence the brethren beloved must needs have a living faith in Jesus the Son of God, as the Saviour of sinners. Encouraged by His gracious invitations, promises, and commands, they must have cast their heart's burthen upon Him. This is the only way in which they can be without spot, and blameless. But in Him they may be complete, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. And diligence to be thus found when He appears,—what is it but care to have a simple faith in Christ, to let nothing hide Him from the soul, and therefore to do nothing which would raise a doubt as to its interest in Him? Here is much to call for watchfulness and prayer. So also must be cherished a desire for the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, by whose power the strength of God is proved to be perfect in the most extreme hour of man's own weakness. He soothes the mind with peace; He sustains and protects that precious gift when it is in danger of being disturbed. And so far as it is possible

for sinful man to advance towards being free from the outward defilements of sin, and blameless in his visible life, yea, and so far as a human heart can be leavened with holiness in this state of imperfection, it is by the blessed Spirit of God that such good is accomplished. Of his presence with Christ's people the promises are numerous and strong, a solid foundation for their faith.

Thus from the calls and exhortations, thrown in amongst the forewarnings which tell that this world is one day to be burned up, we learn that the contemplation of those strange and awful events, and of the ensuing glory which is to be revealed, ought not to issue in dreaminess, or in entertaining the mind with a sort of romance of the future, but to lead to a closer walk with God, to more thoughtful preparation for so solemn a change and so holy a state, and to such careful discipline of the believer's heart and life as shall tend to make him more meet to be a partaker of the promised inheritance of the saints. In a word, the fruit ought to be,

first, diligence to be found in Christ, united to Him by a living faith;—and secondly, diligence to live in the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit.

May the writer and the readers of these few pages on this great subject, not only consider what manner of persons they who look for such things ought to be, but also use all diligence, while life lasts, that they may be found in peace, without spot and blameless, at the appearing of Christ in the day of God! What joy, beyond the conception of the most enlightened mind, to be thus acknowledged by Him; to be admitted into a paradise which no tempter can ever enter; to dwell in a city whose everlasting security and glory will be the presence of God and of the Lamb!

*He which testifieth of these things saith,—
Surely I come quickly! Amen. Even so, come,
Lord Jesus!*^a

^a Rev. xxii. 20

CHAPTER XII.

All through Christ.

CHAPTER XII.

ALL THROUGH CHRIST.

AN exceeding and eternal weight of glory ! such has been the subject of our meditations in the foregoing chapters. We have seen the saints renewed in spirit, and clothed in glorified bodies like that of the ascended Saviour. We have witnessed their blessedness, in the full enjoyment of all that the boundless love and power of Almighty God can devise and provide for their happiness. We have learned that they will be sheltered from every evil, in or out of themselves, that could throw the faintest shadow upon their joy. We have observed them as they dwell together, a multitude which no man could number,

encompassed about by the love, which never faileth, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in a scene which if it be upon this earth will nevertheless be heaven, the paradise of God, the new Jerusalem which is from above, the city whose very description is dazzling and confounding, by reason of the magnificence and brightness with which it is invested. We have meditated reverentially on the worship which just men, made perfect, render to God in the presence of His holiness, and we have watched them going forth to fulfil the counsels of His all-wise will by active service.

Now to what cause is their wonderful exaltation to be ascribed? We remember what they have been for whom such good things are provided, surpassing our present understanding. They all were sinners. They had no right of their own to that inheritance. Their deservings would have gained for them a very different portion. We may see one who denied that he knew his Lord, and another who was exceedingly mad against those who believed in the name of Jesus. All have sinned, and

come short of the glory of God. There is not one whose own thoughts, words, and deeds have not disqualified him for that holy presence,—except it be the little infant; and yet even his nature was corrupt, for he was born in sin.

The blessedness which we have been contemplating is not to be attributed to man's own righteousness, and is to be ascribed altogether, the whole of it, to God's mercy in Christ. This eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He sees in it the fruit of the travail of His soul, and therein He is satisfied. He gave to the infant its robe of righteousness. He rescued the sinner from destruction, and made peace for him with His Father. He led the believer by a way which he might not understand, but at the end of which he entered the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He paid the penalty due to the transgressions of a life, and to the heart's alienation from Him who had always claimed its love. He smote the conscience with the godly sorrow of true

repentance. He wrought the faith, awakened the hope, instilled the love, inspired the spirit of obedience. From the beginning to the end of the spiritual life, all was of Him, and to Him all the glory is due. The words of the Psalmist may in that day be repeated in the highest strain of grateful acknowledgment,—*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.**

Therefore let our last thoughts in connection with these anticipations be of Him. Always, when the eye of our faith rests on the glory which is to be revealed, let us remember His name with gratitude love and praise. When, by the aid of revelation, we now walk about the new Jerusalem which is to come down from God out of heaven, let us look upon the Lamb who is in the midst of it, and let us open our ears to hear the expressive anthem of adoring saints,—*Worthy is the Lamb which was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us*

* Psalm cxv. 1.

*to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.**

But also, let all who have this hope of blessedness as His gift, and as the fruit of His love, be diligent to glorify Him in soul and body ; let them seek to have their faith made stronger, their love deeper and quicker, and the dedication of their own selves to Him more thorough and true.

If one died for all, then were all dead, and He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.^b

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own ? For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.^c

Hence, be this our prayer,—*Teach me to do thy will ; for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good ; lead me into the land of uprightness.^d*

* Rev. v. 9, 12.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^b 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^d Psalm cxliiii. 10.

WITH THEE!

How soothing to ponder in silence
On the time which so quickly will be,
When the world may be heaving and restless;
But I shall be resting with Thee.

The storm may be wild in its fury,
And the brave ship may founder at sea,
And the waves break on shore like the thunder,
But I shall be harboured with Thee.

Still nation shall war against nation,
All frantic with blind enmity,
And the cannon shall wake up the sleepers,
How sweet my repose then with Thee.

Ambition and strife shall be rampant,
And divisions where men should agree,
And the good be borne down by the scorners,
But I shall be tranquil with Thee.

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Still sin, and remorse, and temptation ;
Still sorrow, and chill penury ;
Still pain,—shall embitter man's portion,
How good then my portion with Thee.

Life's trials, and wearying struggle,
Fell care, and keen anxiety,
Shall e'en press down the heart that was hopeful,
But there's no disappointment with Thee.

Still the sceptic and bold misbeliever
From Thy bondage shall boast themselves
free,
But no doubt shall disturb my blest spirit
When I shall know all things from Thee.

But the world is not all draped in sadness,
There is no such abiding decree,
And Thy love shall be gladsome to many,
When I am rejoicing with Thee.

Still the summer shall smile in its beauty,
And the sweet bird shall sing on the tree,
And the autumn yield bright golden harvests,
When I have been gathered to Thee.

The good mother shall fondle her infant,
With gay song or soft psalmody,
Or delight in his new waking pleasure,
When I shall be happier with Thee.

Many homes shall be cheerful and loving,
(O, may mine be in fond unity !)
And at once be both blest and a blessing,
When I shall be dwelling with Thee.

And full many a heart of affection
Shall be hastening with kind charity
To befriend the afflicted and sinful,
When I shall be cherished with Thee.

And in love Thou wilt bless thine own people,
With joy and with tranquillity,
But surer, and sweeter, and better,
Good Lord, will my joy be with Thee.

Then, O help me, while here, to be faithful,
Ever looking to high Calvary,
And sustained on my way by Thy Spirit,
Till I come to Thy city and Thee.

174 THE FUTURE LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS.

And if any delusion becloud me,
Lord open mine eyes that I see ;
And uphold me, an heir of salvation,
That I fail not of mercy with Thee.

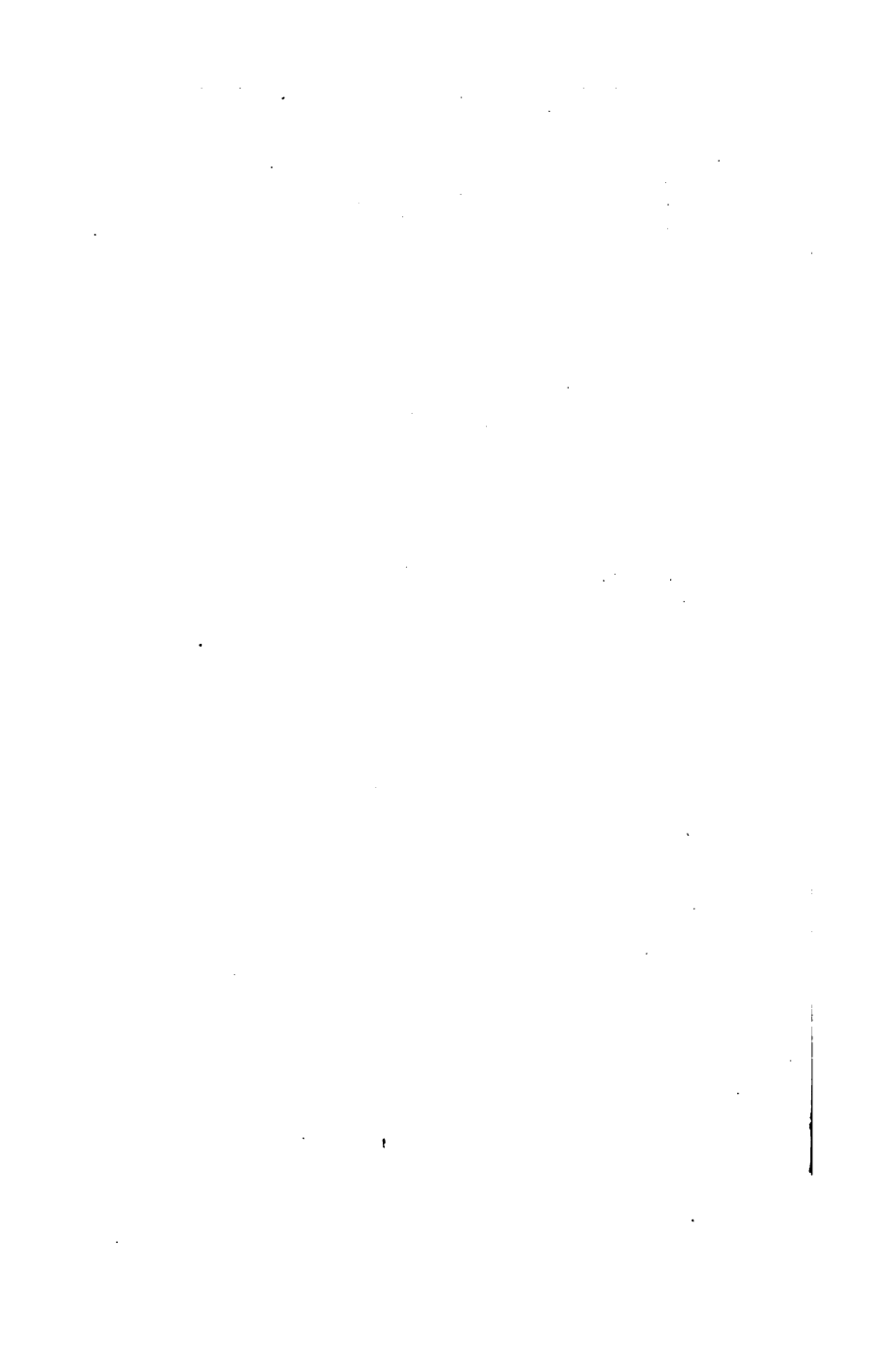
What wondrous love ! O what compassion !
O what grace for a sinner like me,
To be snatched as a brand from the burning,
And to live there for ever with Thee ;

With the angels and holy archangels,
And with all heaven's blest company ;
Above all with the Saviour who bought me,
And, all-bountiful Father, with Thee.

And with that blessed life-giving Spirit
Who has wrought His work thus graciously,
And who leaves me not, neither forsakes me,
Till He lands me in glory with Thee.



LONDON:
WILLIAM MACINTOSH,
24, PATERNOSTER-BOW







the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million. The number of people who are malnourished has increased from 1.2 billion to 1.6 billion. The number of people who are obese has increased from 100 million to 300 million.

The World Bank has estimated that the cost of malnutrition to the world economy is \$100 billion per year. The cost of obesity to the world economy is \$100 billion per year. The cost of undernourishment to the world economy is \$100 billion per year. The cost of malnutrition to the world economy is \$100 billion per year.

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